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COMMERCE RAIDERS

BOOKS ON THE SEA

by

E. KEBLE CHATTERTON

SAILING SHIPS AND THEIR STORY
SHIPS AND WAYS OF OTHER DAYS
FORE AND AFT: THE STORY OF THE FORE AND AFT RIG
THE STORY OF THE BRITISH NAVY
KING'S CUTTERS AND SMUGGLERS
STEAMSHIPS AND THEIR STORY
THE ROMANCE OF THE SHIP
THE ROMANCE OF PIRACY
THE OLD EAST INDIAMEN
Q-SHIPS AND THEIR STORY.
THE ROMANCE OF SEA ROVERS
THE MERCANTILE MARINE
THE AUXILIARY PATROL
WHALERS AND WHALING
CHATS ON NAVAL PRINTS
THE SHIP UNDER SAIL
BATTLES BY SEA
STEAMSHIP MODELS
SHIP MODELS
SEAMEN ALL
WINDJAMMERS AND SHELLBACKS
BROTHERHOOD OF THE SEA
CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH
OLD SHIP PRINTS
VENTURES AND VOYAGES
OLD SEA PAINTINGS
ON THE HIGH SEAS
ENGLISH SEAMEN AND THE COLONIZATION OF AMERICA
THE SEA RAIDERS
GALLANT GENTLEMEN
THE "KOENIGSBERG" ADVENTURE
THE BIG BLOCKADE
THE YACHTSMAN'S PILOT
SAILING MODELS
DANGER ZONE
AMAZING ADVENTURE
DARDANELLES DILEMMA
VALIANT SAILORMEN
"SEVERN'S" SAGA
LEADERS OF BRITAIN: THE ROYAL NAVY
THE EPIC OF DUNKIRK
FIGHTING THE U-BOATS

Cruises

DOWN CHANNEL IN THE "VIVETTE"
THROUGH HOLLAND IN THE "VIVETTE"
THROUGH BRITTANY IN "CHARMINA"
TO THE MEDITERRANEAN IN "CHARMINA"
"CHARMINA" ON THE RIVIERA

COMMERCE RAIDERS

by

E. KEBLE CHATTERTON

(Author of '*The Epic of Dunkirk*')

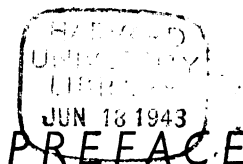
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It is interesting to observe how with the passage of time we do not always find that words retain their meaning but take on a new quality through the change of events.

In the last war we thought of 'raiders' as steamers of a speed exceeding 20 knots selected for making swift incursions against our vessels pursuing their peaceable way along the shipping routes. This was the meaning which existed during August 1914. Later on, when such venturers became of much more moderate speed, such as the notorious *Seeadler* (which voyaged round the Horn under sail), they still retained the name 'raiders' although not necessarily fast. They had won a certain reputation as plunderers and marauders but relied rather on their skill than their engines.

No longer was the word 'swift' associated with raiders of the *Möwe* and *Wolf* types that jogged along economically.

And in the war which began in 1939 'raid' became associated not exclusively with even a maritime surprise attack: for a 'raider' might be a land aeroplane. Nevertheless usage has developed the word as applying to a fast battleship, a moderately fast but converted merchantman, a submarine, or a Focke-Wulf aircraft.

In this volume we deal with each of these four types as marauders of our shipping.

E. KEBLE CHATTERTON.

First published 1943

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

By way of making fully clear to the reader that which is contained in the following chapters, perhaps a few introductory words may here be permitted.

When in January 1931 and subsequent editions of *The Sea-Raiders* I was able to show that Germany's initial efforts to cripple our trade as an island nation were directed against our sea-borne commerce principally in the North and South Atlantic, I was careful to point out that whilst the enemy had undertaken a vast scheme involving immensely detailed efforts and the steaming of fast ships over countless miles, yet on the whole this ambitious roving turned out such a thorough failure that after nine months' cruising their ships no longer were fit for the job. Hulls needed to be dry-docked, engines thoroughly overhauled, officers and men rested.

Notwithstanding the network of German colliers and supply ships, besides secret rendezvous off Atlantic islands; cautious use of wireless and considerable local duplicity arranged between the German Naval Attaché and certain South American owners with shipping interests; German enterprise, despite the expenditure of millions sterling, could not succeed. It was foredoomed to failure because Great Britain was the one and only Power possessing a chain of defended sea bases encircling the globe where her own vessels could refit and the crews gain rest. But I was careful to emphasize also that in any future hostilities the increasing use of oil-fuel instead of coal, and the much larger employment of aircraft both for raider and cruiser alike, would considerably modify these conditions.

"Nothing however can upset the basic fact that the raider's deadliest enemy is a vessel which can conceal her superiority until the raider finds it is too late."

The first phase of the enemy's sea warfare in 1914 was founded on false thinking. Because the enemy imagined that the ideal raider was an ocean greyhound able to do her 23 knots, well-known German liners such as the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* and *Kronprinz Wilhelm* were chosen from many others, coaled, provisioned. Rendezvous were then arranged at sea, guns handed over from a German cruiser, and these ex-passenger ships (now converted into fast hunters) would prowl about the sea-tracks till the first trader should be sighted. But it was an utter mistake to reason that a German swift liner would make an ideal raider. For experience soon showed that her presence on the trade routes meant just a series of dull eventless periods spent blowing off wasted steam, varied by some short spasms of hurried travel and then once again it was dull monotony followed by wearisome coaling perhaps after an interval of only four days. All the time this effort of turning up somewhere to meet her collier and refill bunkers before regaining the ship-routes was a perpetual anxiety to the German; so when at last the crack liner was condemned, she was succeeded in the second phase by vessels of the *Möwe* type: that is to say a medium-sized cargo steamer of moderate speed, armed like one of our Q-ships with guns and torpedo-tubes, disguised by dummy devices in respect of deck-houses and steering-gear.

With holds full of coal such a vessel could steam economically from the time she left Germany in December to returning three months later. And meanwhile this raider would fall upon some victim in the Atlantic and even manage to lay as many as 250 mines off the coast to entrap other shipping.

It was Commander Burggraf Graf Nikolaus zu Dohna-Schlodien who in making two such voyages aboard the *Möwe* proved this new reasoning meant a sounder raider technique. Some would-be successors followed, but the vigilance of our patrols was too much for several of them.

It was thus the *Greif* which fifty-six hours after leaving Kiel was sunk by our *Alcantara*; and the raider *Leopard* was similarly caught by H.M.S. *Dundee* and *Achilles*.

Yet during the autumn of 1917 Germany—still pursuing the *Möwe* principle—sent to sea one of the Hansa liners of medium size, and because in her there is such a close connection with the raiders of the present war; we may well pause to examine the Hansa ship.

This vessel was a single-screw steamer of 5809 tons gross and 3627 tons net, measuring 489 ft. long, beam 56.2 ft. and a depth of 29.6 ft. Named the *Wachfels*, she had two decks, a poop 60 ft. long and a fo'c'sle 54 ft. She was built before that war, in 1913, at Flensburg. Fitted with triple-expansion engines, electric light, and a small refrigerating plant, she could maintain a 10½ knots speed at 60 tons of coal a day, or 8 knots if consuming only 35 tons. Her holds and bunkers before leaving Germany were filled with 6000 tons of coal, which gave her three months of fuel independence. The *Wachfels* was thus an economical steamer of moderate speed.

Furthermore she was the last type of vessel which would incur the slightest suspicion as a raider, for with her single medium-sized black funnel *Wachfels* resembled an ordinary cargo vessel that might be seen on any trade route. Her two masts were slightly raked, above which were unusually tall topmasts which could be hoisted or lowered in changing disguise. Ordinarily her upper bridge was painted a very dark grey, but everything else had a black colour, and a cask could be hoisted to the foremast when scanning a wide lonely sea for more careful lookout.

The aerial of her wireless led down to the bridge, and on the boat-deck was the range-finder.

When this latest expression of the enemy sea-raider departed from Germany in the autumn of 1917 she thus represented an entirely different type from the 14,349 tons *Wilhelm der Grosse* of 22 knots. The Germans as a result of their experience had now come to a complete alteration of view as to what constituted the ideal waylayer of commercial shipping. Those two principles of warfare—surprise and ability to mystify—were now regarded by the enemy as of the chiefest importance; tonnage and speed of merely secondary consideration, but ability to keep the seas for months at a time all over the world, a really valuable asset.

The *Wachfels* stabilized the sea-raider's armament so as to enable her easily to hold her own if called upon to fight a British light cruiser or armed merchantman. That is to say the Hansa liner carried two 5.9-inch, two 4.1-inch, and two 4-pounder, guns, besides machine-guns and two pairs of above-water torpedo-tubes; yet all of these were well disguised or hidden by dummy erections, canvas screens, collapsible doors and the like. In short, provided such a vessel could only run through our blockade off the North of Scotland and escape notice till well out on the Atlantic, she had overcome

the worst risks. But it was found that by leaving Germany not earlier than November, making the best efforts with the long hours of night, taking full advantage of mist, rain and fog, the venturer would have quite a fair chance.

Now this *Wachtfels* before leaving Germany changed her name to *Wolf*, and because she carried a seaplane named that the *Wolfchen* ('Wolf cub'). The latter was for 1917 an extremely modern touch, of which full use has been made in the present war, as we shall presently perceive. With its 150 horse-power engine capable of carrying pilot, observer and four small bombs to a height of 13,000 feet; primitive though we may consider such a machine; yet we must remember that its novelty made the art of raiding still more different from those early days of the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* period.

The *Wolf* indeed was the triumph of a new era and developed so late as barely to bring the art of commerce-raiding to its fullest success only just before the war of 1914-18 came to an end. Thus, when the second period of hostilities began in the autumn of 1939, Germany had merely to look up her previous records to employ the most modern type of suitable ship, and remember that coal had now given way to oil-fuel. This of course was very greatly to the raider's advantage since her radius and independence became considerably more extensive. But otherwise the former fighting methods with their concealed torpedo-tubes and guns were much the same, and really the Germans of the second war shewed that practically all their tricks had been perviously learned. A curious dearth of ideas has indeed marked the modern raider's methods.

To be precise, the *Wolf* had a crew of about 380. Her captain was Commander Karl Nerger, the Chief Officer belonged to the Imperial Naval Reserve, her Chief Engineer had formerly been the Hamburg-Amerika Line's Engineer-Superintendent. She had come forth also with a cargo of 500 mines and the first of these she laid off the Cape of Good Hope early in January 1917, but this fouling of conspicuous headlands along the world's highways was merely a precedent for raiders in the second war.

In a word, then, the Nazis would seem to have taken Nerger's voyage and methods as a stereotyped pattern to be tried again in 1940 onwards. And whatever originality Hitler's naval officers attempted was rather in the using of raiders as supply ships for ocean-going U-boats than in developing a new technique attacking our sea commerce.

When Nerger brought back the *Wolf* to Germany in February 1918 she had long been given up for lost, yet all this while he had spent fifteen months of raiding in almost every sea of the globe. One cannot deny that in steaming 64,000 miles as a disguised trader and running so many risks that her cruise reads more like a boy's adventure novel, the *Wolf* established so many valuable precedents that raiders in this Second World War knew exactly what to do from the beginning.

But the Nazis were certainly far-sighted, and between the two wars spent no little time in summarizing and studying the lessons to be learned: for instance, one of the most daring of these raiders was Count Felix von Luckner, who, in the last war, practised his art under sail. This resourceful officer even voyaged many miles across the Pacific in a converted ship's lifeboat, only to be arrested by a native policeman. After being imprisoned in New Zealand he escaped by means of a stolen local sailing craft. But some time after the war, and being finally released, he obtained for himself a suitable sailing vessel aboard which he again planned to go round the world. What

exactly was his purpose has never quite been established, but many have thought that this intensive study of geography in odd corners of the world had a practical objective.

In certain parts of New Zealand, for instance, this ex-raider's notoriety was so well remembered that his reception as a visitor hardly won enthusiasm. It is also to be noted that immediately prior to the present war he and his ship had so nearly returned to Germany that they put into Dover Harbour, where they secured in the Granville Dock. Although it was quite obvious that hostilities would soon break out, Luckner at first seemed in no particular hurry to clear away seaward. One of my friends who used to go aboard the German's vessel and yarn with Luckner came to a certain conclusion as to why this former German naval officer overstayed his welcome in England till near the very end. Some have thought that it was part of the Count's plan to learn of British intentions from first hand, but if the object of Luckner's long voyage in distant seas had primarily been to bring back to the Nazis all possible data which would be invaluable for those world raiders mentioned in subsequent chapters, can we be altogether surprised at this theory? For many parts of the world still remain to be given accurate cartographic details, nor have we forgotten that in the last war a German raider, *Dresden*, was able to hide herself successfully in the neighbourhood of Cape Horn simply because where she floated confidently, our charts inaccurately showed dry land.

So much reliable and detailed knowledge as to soundings, tricky channels, tidal streams and the like can be obtained conveniently by means of an unhurried personal visit in some alleged 'yacht' or ill-defined 'scientific' vessel, that we need hardly wonder many a modern raider successfully concealed herself during the days of 1940 with so much ease. Certainly the modern vessel was not to be compared with the sail-driven ship of the olden days. Even a whaler could go off on a world voyage and return to her home port after three strenuous years.

Nowadays in a converted oil-tanker the raider who fixes up rendezvous occasionally for additional supplies, and knows intimately both where fresh victims can be pounced upon and where convenient secluded bays are to be found only just off the main shipping routes that may readily be combed by an aeroplane; almost has the old-time liberty, and some day it is not too much to imagine in the time of peace a former marauder cruising may be now turned pirate.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST RAIDERS OF THIS WAR

DURING those months which immediately preceded the opening of this Second World War with Germany in September 1939 there was always a certain vague air of mystery about the German Navy and an absence of genuine camaraderie. On the few occasions when Englishmen met Germans

in the sport of boat-sailing or during the international yachting contest for the race from the Solent round the Fastnet, it was always noticeable that the Nazis were bad losers: their motto was not "Let the best boat win" but "Let victory fall to a German always".

It is true that on a few occasions Germany did not forget her sea manners, as for instance when Admiral Raeder came over to London so as to represent his country's Navy at the funeral of Admiral Lord Jellicoe in St. Paul's cathedral: but as a whole any meeting between officers of the respective navies was deficient in personal enthusiasm, and too much mutual suspicion—too eager watchfulness of the other's actions—existed to promote a feeling of trustfulness.

Of course it was common knowledge that the Teutonic Navy in big ships built or building did not amount to considerable tonnage but it included the three so-called pocket-battleships *Admiral Graf Spee*, *Admiral Scheer* and *Deutschland*, each of which had the following characteristics: 10,000 tons displacement, speed 26 knots but driven by diesels. Length 610 feet, beam 68 feet, armed with six 11-inch, eight 5.9 inch, six 4.1 inch anti-aircraft guns and eight above-water tubes. Two aircraft with catapult were also carried.

These battleships were built in the period 1931-4 and it will be at once noticeable that however soon, or however long postponed, would be the coming war against Britain, Germany had created three warships which might be expected to play an important part in the campaign against our sea-commerce. It would be expected that as regards guns they could stand up against any escorts of our convoys, yet as raiders they could cruise for weeks at economical speed, using their diesels and oil fuel in a manner very different from fast-driven steamships. Thus they might spend weeks in a locality at slow speed till the next victim showed up over the horizon, yet with no great effort could high speed be made and then the raider be sent off somewhere else. And their moderate tonnage electrically welded made them fairly cheap to build. The addition of aircraft finally shewed that in each of these three vessels had been embodied those lessons so fully learnt by Neger.

Less than five months before the war two (*Admiral Graf Spee* and the *Deutschland*), accompanied by three cruisers, a flotilla of destroyers as well as one flotilla of submarines, left Germany for a spring cruise in the Atlantic. Now although this squadron started from Germany on April 18, 1939, it was typical of the Nazis' unorthodox methods that no report of the ships' positions was received until the captain of a Channel steamer reported by wireless on April 20 that he had sighted the squadron passing through the Straits of Dover, and next day French seaplanes reported them leaving the English Channel for the Atlantic. On April 24 a British liner bound for Gibraltar passed four of the German destroyers off Finisterre carrying out fuelling exercises with two tankers.

Later that summer the squadron came back to Germany and we know that on September 3 war commenced between us and Germany, but it is extraordinarily clear that at a time when the final days of peace were ending Hitler was secretly determined to be in a position to attack us from that day on our trade routes: in fact with remarkable duplicity and stealthy insincerity he had already planned to assail us through our most sensitive spot—sea-borne commerce. It was a cunning plan that *instantly* submarines should

be in the right position and ready to operate. Now September 3 was a Sunday, and Saturday is generally a favourite day when a passenger vessel might be expected to begin her outward voyage from a British port. Therefore on Sunday evening a vessel of such a speed having left (for example) Glasgow for America the previous day might be expected in roughly a certain position.

So when the outward-bound Donaldson liner *Athenia* (13,581 tons) reached her position west of the Hebrides, she was promptly met and sunk by a U-boat. To have arrived at this spot, the submarine left Germany at least five or six days earlier, crossed the North Sea, passed round Scotland and had taken up her patrol along the sea-track. She had nothing to wait for except the wireless instruction after 11 a.m. that day "Commence Action" and then keep a good look-out.

Other submarines had been despatched well ahead of time to waylay vessels using more southerly tracks. For instance off the jagged cliffs that line the Portuguese coast was lurking a U-boat which had no difficulty in sinking on September 5 one of the Cunard small freighters named the *Bosnia*. The German must have left Heligoland Bight as early as August 26, i.e. a whole week before declaration of war. Hitler was giving no chance of talks ending peaceably: war was his intention, and the well-placed submarines were only part of his scheme for wounding an island nation.

Little though he knew about seafaring matters, Germany's existing records of raiders in the previous war were enough to remind him that the ocean highways joining South Atlantic to the British Isles were those which not merely brought meat and maize from South America, cotton and wool from Africa; but up the Atlantic from Australia came lead and zinc from the mines, whilst this way were being sent the cheese and butter of New Zealand.

To harass these southern trade routes, then, something bigger than submarines was needed. Until France had been captured with its ports, such as those which faced the Atlantic; until also U-boats had more generally been adapted for ocean-going with a regular service of supply-ships carrying for them stores and barrels of diesel oil; surface raiders were relied upon. The Nazis therefore in their resolve to sink British cargo-carriers had a two-fold method: (1) the U-boats, (2) the oil-consuming surface ships. And at first the latter consisted of the heavily armed 26-knot pocket-battleships which would be independent of all weather and able to cover quickly different oceanic areas.

The area of a submarine's activity in the first few months of war was strictly limited. The Germans reckoned in the last war that a U-boat needed a week to proceed from Wilhelmshaven or Kiel to Irish waters, wherein they would cruise for a second week and a third week; after which they would spend the fourth week on the return voyage to Germany, where the boat would ordinarily have a month's refit and the crew be rested. Pretty much this routine for a submarine continued certainly till after June 1940, so that the overseas attacks began to be made by the pocket-battleship *Admiral Graf Spee* in the south, leaving nearer regions to the submarines.

The fog of war and the enemy's sea intentions had not become completely clarified during the first month of hostilities, but something occurred on October 8, 1939, when the enemy desired to pass at least one of the three pocket-battleships into the Atlantic. The long dark nights and dirty weather of autumn and winter had already begun, and by means of a trick

on our fleet the Germans enabled one capital ship to get away. Which? Presumably the *Deutschland*. On that Sunday afternoon some of our patrol craft did sight a Nazi squadron S.W. of Norway, and our forces endeavoured to engage it. But in the darkness the enemy managed to get away.

It is supposed that this was the ancient device of allowing the squadron to escape in one direction whilst distracting attention from the *Deutschland*, who was to cruise for some time in northern latitudes. Reports that she was preying on commerce began to trickle in and these finally culminated in the action of November 23 when, near to Iceland, the *Deutschland* surprised the armed merchant cruiser *Rawalpindi*—a former P. & O. vessel of 16,697 tons—whilst the latter was on patrol.

Between such a lightly armed vessel with 6-inch weapons and the German with her 11-inch guns the issue could not long remain in doubt. The former passenger vessel (not in her first youth), with her easily recognized two funnels and two masts, was serving on contraband control under Captain E. C. Kennedy, R.N. Although the weaker unit, she tried to fire all her guns till put out of action. Rather than surrender, she preferred to succumb, and with her into the chilly waters went most of her crew to the bottom. A dozen survivors came up to the Admiralty, direct and dishevelled, and were received by the Second Sea Lord.

This onslaught by the *Deutschland* begins the first phase by Nazi surface ships against our seaborne commerce, but the *Admiral Graf Spee* had also left Germany before the end of September, took every advantage to steal through the blockade—always an easier undertaking at the beginning of hostilities before every ship is on her station—and soon was motoring on a southerly course, giving all traffic a wide berth till gaining the South American trade routes of Pernambuco.

From the first certainly the *Admiral Graf Spee* was not particularly lucky. In terror of British naval patrols, she dared not hang about a locality but must keep on moving. Although she had been able to come out from northern Europe at an average of 15 knots, she did not find those South American ship-lanes very profitable, and since the stream of valuable cargo-carriers bound north for Europe via Cape Verde and the Canaries somehow did not come her way, she sped further east from the Brazilian coast, and not till the last day of September came across the Booth liner *Clement*, which she proceeded to sink.

This action of course sufficiently advertised the German's presence and she must get away out of the region; for, as in the previous war against our shipping, whilst unable to say where exactly British naval patrols in the South Atlantic chanced to be, the enemy well believed they could not be far from the shipping tracks and might at any moment appear with sudden vehemence, so the raider spent the next week cruising further east till she struck that route which comes up from Cape Town. It was thus that on October 7 she waylaid the 4222-tons S.S. *Ashlea*, removing her crew as prisoners. Next day she treated the 4651-tons S.S. *Newton Beach* in similar manner.

These events in a busy steamship area show not merely that our losses were beginning to be significant along one of the most important of the Empire's trade routes, but that these attacks on our seaborne freight might quickly mount up unless arrangements had been made for routing traffic and thus trying to direct valuable vessels so as to avoid the danger zone.

It must be borne in mind, however, that the arranging of convoys is a matter of such meticulous detail, and means in the gathering together of so many vessels at the last port of assembly such as Cape Town, an expenditure of time so great that the voyaging of all this rich tonnage cannot always be ordered promptly in the early days of war. It may be found necessary that some shipping had best be despatched as individual units and run the gauntlet than waste valuable time. These vessels coming up from below the equator were on long voyages that included Australia and New Zealand, and often with cargoes of food which required the minimum of delay.

More simple was the problem of ships whose days at sea need not be numerous, whose speed could be geared to accord with that of the slowest unit. A large convoy from some port in the Mediterranean bound for England would justify its delay by reason of safety. For instance, even on September 4, 1939, the day after war began, one such numerous convoy started from Port Said under the care of a Commodore (second class) R.N.R., who in private life actually was a retired Vice-Admiral R.N. Selecting one of the six vessels as his flagship, he could afford to risk injury by delay when the voyage to England was really only a few days rather than a few weeks.

The *Admiral Graf Spee* was thus able in the first days of hostilities to take advantage of her own power and the lonely unescorted victims that were churning the Atlantic northwards towards the equator. Ten days after this swift and powerful battleship had sunk the *Newton Beach* she mopped up the 8196-tons Harrison liner *Huntsman* and the 5299-tons motor ship *Trevannion*.

The technique of destruction was in all cases much the same. First the German would signal the merchantman to stop her engines, then the raider would approach, lower a boat, send a boarding party who would place bombs along the innocent vessel's sides. Sending the British crew aboard the *Admiral Graf Spee* as prisoners, there would soon be a series of German explosions, the sides of the victim would be blown away and the sea come pouring in. It was all done quickly, and away the German would hurry towards the next dot on the horizon.

The sudden change from the life on board their own ships to a foreign man-of-war largely manned by inexperienced young south Germans was hardly a welcome change for British mariners. "You have only ten minutes before leaving your ship," a German order had sought to impress our fellow nationals, but more impressive than this dominating and bullying manner was the nervous haste of the captors. Who could guess how soon the captives' wireless would have caused a British cruiser to appear from nowhere?

The excessive vibration of this battleship's diesels rivalled the scarcely suppressed excitement of her somewhat raw crew of Nazis. Some day the time would come when their spirits would be put to the trial. All very well at present bullying commercial ships, for the task could not be easier. Could the cruise continue like this?

This part of the Atlantic was beginning to yield a less fruitful crop, so the German decided to forsake this area and see what was round the corner. Doubling the Cape of Good Hope, venturing past the shores of Natal to the Indian Ocean, he tried fresh scenes and somewhere about this time was met by a vessel of the customary tanker appearance such as nowadays one is

accustomed to notice in almost every sea. You know that modern type, with just one short dumpy funnel aft and a 'cruiser' stern.

This somewhat mysterious ship had indeed been constructed for fetching oil from South America across the sea to Hamburg. Perhaps that summer, because the Nazis saw the war coming very near, this oil-driven vessel was kept closer to home and employed trading between Germany and Scandinavia. Any of our captive prisoners who noticed the name on her sides might have learned in the standard volume *Lloyd's Register of Shipping* that she was conspicuous by her absence from these pages. That omission would have seemed something curious had these mariners just then been no longer separated from such books. Still more suspiciously the June (1939) *List of Coast and Ship Stations*, published by the International Union of Telegraphic and Wireless Communications at Berne, did include this tanker but marked it by crossed swords.

A German auxiliary warship? Somehow this very important fact was for a long time forgotten by the Nazis.

What was the idea of pretending she was not a quasi man-of-war?

The truth came out slowly, and the first realization was that she had been sent from Germany to join the raider as *Admiral Graf Spee's* prison ship for captured British mercantile mariners; for the last war had taught raiders that this compulsory care of such people was a real problem. It was now expected that with uncluttered decks the battleship would be able to continue her sinking of British ships whilst the other became a floating prison which could be summoned from no great distance away; and meanwhile have no hampering effect on the hurrying raider, who simply dared not be caught.

CHAPTER III

TRAGEDY OF A RAIDER

HAVING rounded the Cape of Good Hope's eastern side in search of fresh victims, the *Admiral Graf Spee* went no higher than the latitude of Lorenzo Marques, near which she sighted a more local unit engaged in the delivery of oil. Named the *Africa Shell*, of 704 tons, this little vessel was sunk on November 15, and the *Mapia* one day later. Still, the enemy could not claim he was achieving much by this raiding cruise since nothing else had happened after October 21 when *Trevannion* succumbed; so back again to the South Atlantic the battleship now thought it best to return where, on December 2, she overcame the Blue Star *Doric Star*, 10,086 tons, homeward bound. Built so recently as 1921, the latter had left Cape Town astern four days before.

Suddenly the *Doric Star's* officer-of-the-watch was startled by the arrival on deck of a shell fragment. At 100 yards distance from the port quarter a projectile had exploded in the sea: things were happening.

When the liner's master, Captain William Stubbs, rushed up to the bridge and focused his lens on the topmast head of a warship coming towards him,

the intervening distance was about 15 miles. It should be recollected that immediately abaft this mast, normally wearing her flag, was the German ship's funnel. Although the stranger was approaching bows-on, she could not be identified in detail but aroused suspicion. Captain Stubbs therefore at once dictated a report which the wireless operator flashed across the ocean. Perhaps somewhere in the Atlantic a British man-of-war was listening?

Whistle! Whoop! Crash!

A pyramidal waterspout rose from the waves.

This time a shell flopped 200 yards off the starboard bow, having travelled eight miles from the battleship, whose superstructure was becoming clearer. Splendidly the *Doric Star's* operator went on tapping his key to amplify the distress call, and this infuriated Captain Langsdorff, the raider's commanding officer, who snapped out on his morse-lamp the significant curt message:

"Forbidden to use your wireless."

A typically Hunnish signal, which the radio officer ignored till he heard his message being repeated by other ships in the vicinity.

And now at full speed the Nazi was reeling off the knots, but to reality she added German trickery. As she swerved a little from her original course and turned broadside-on, Captain Stubbs noticed that though she was a genuine battleship, she had disguised herself by adding a second (dummy) funnel and the *Admiral Graf Spee* now resembled H.M.S. *Renown*. Of course this method of deception was as old as the days of Lord Charles Beresford, who had experimented with faked canvas and light wooden frames in naval manœuvres.

At a distance, so long as the stranger was kept dead-on, an unsuspecting mariner might have been fooled into supposing that either the *Renown* or her sister *Repulse* was patrolling; but the Nazi pocket-battleship had only one turret forward whereas the *Renown* class carried a second, mounted abaft the first. Only when broadside on to the liner was this noticeable, and distinguished foe from friend.

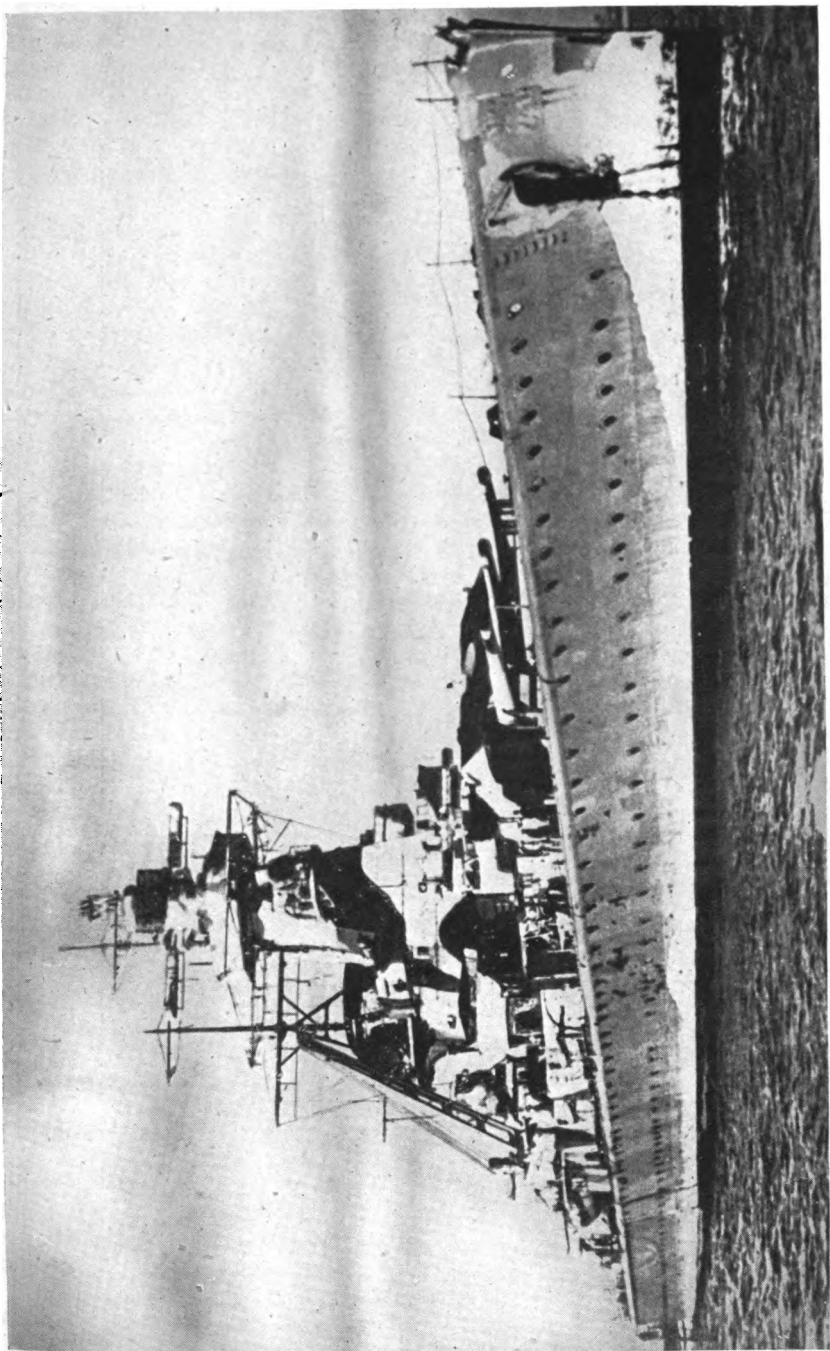
Heaving-to only a quarter of a mile off, the raider having stopped diesels lowered a boat and sent a boarding party just as was done in the last war and the present. The British crew of 64 with their officers were given ten minutes to leave, but so spasmodically did the German bombs explode that the raider in her haste had to fire also seven shells and even a torpedo before the *Doric Star* disappeared below the waves.

Night fell, but at length dawned another day, and before the sun blazed its full rays across the sea, Captain Langsdorff espied the Shaw Savill & Albion *Tairoa* five miles off. Yesterday the *Tairoa* had picked up the *Doric Star's* warning message, so the Master was almost expecting to see the raider come in sight and already was looking out from the bridge.

Once again Langsdorff artfully withheld recognition by not shewing his broadside. The Nazi certainly was flying his flag as usual above the yard abaft the bridge, but again there existed that bit of deception which doubtless the enemy would argue was mere accident. In accordance with her usual practice, this flag flying from the topmast head was small of size but it had become so blackened by smoke from the funnel that no one could pretend it was that of a British admiral.

So the *Tairoa* waited till the distance lessened. Four miles . . . three . . . two. A string of coloured bunting sent out a signal.

"I am coming to board you. . . ."



THE ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE
lying anchored at Monte Video.



THE RAIDER AT WORK

This photograph, taken from aboard the pocket battleship, shows her sinking the British *S.S. Trevanion* in the South Atlantic before the *Admiral Graf Spee* hurries towards South American waters, where the German finally is defeated.

Was it a British man-of-war after all?

The *Tairoa* rang down to the engine-room, the enemy stopped only three-quarters of mile away and opened fire from her 5.9-inch, of which four were placed on either side. The *Tairoa* received injuries to steering gear, wings of her bridge were smashed, the sandbags protecting the Marconi room were dislodged, and from that moment all uncertainty was ended. Pretty fiercely her bridge continued to be plastered by projectiles, and three times were her officers driven below. Mr. P. J. Cummings, however, insisted on flashing out his radio, whereupon the raider resumed shelling and ceased only when the transmitter broke off. Cummings again tried. He was too gallant a wireless operator to abandon the effort, but two German shells blew the wireless to destruction, then the crew of 81 were driven out of their ship; but for his courage and devotion to duty even Captain Langsdorff complimented him.

Still the life of a raider has to be exceptional if she is to prolong her success. Type of ship, perfection of arrangements for receiving supplies, luck in the great risks which every marauder must run; these were some of the entities which eventually would help to bring about decisions of some importance. Considering the speed and armament of the *Admiral Graf Spee*, and that for about three months she was allowed utter freedom to do what she pleased against our merchant shipping, it cannot be claimed that Langsdorff had achieved considerable success. A big change in the affairs of this raiding was bound to come; destiny must be on its way, but one more victim still remained to complete the list. And then?

The pocket-battleship had already worked over to the western side of the Atlantic, her attendant prison ship was somewhere on this ocean with—certainly not all the captives from the sunken ships—and now it was on December 7, nearer to the Atlantic's western side, not far from Brazilian shores, that the S.S. *Streonshalph* found herself added to the list of victims.

Much, however, may happen in a week—a remarkable change in the life of ship and men. The raider was running short of supplies—oil-fuel, stores, provisions—and already in the Uruguayan port of Montevideo she was being awaited by the S.S. *Tacoma* acting as her supply-ship. But an extraordinary development suddenly altered this adventurous cruise of the pocket-battleship some 200 miles out in the Atlantic. It was December 13, 1939, and the time about 7 a.m., when the raider sighted the French S.S. *Formose*. At her the *Admiral Graf Spee* opened fire and was about to perform a new swoop when yet another complication changed the trend of events.

Three British cruisers, who had been listening to victims' bleatings in the South Atlantic, appeared to some purpose. H.M.S. *Exeter* was engaged in a considerable duel with the raider, who now fled for shelter towards Montevideo. Finally the pocket-battleship, who throughout her cruise had always waged warfare according to her own rules against inferior strength, was dealt with in a manner that Captain Langsdorff had never suspected. After H.M.S. *Ajax* and *Achilles* in pursuit had by clever handling plus the right employment of gunnery and smoke-screens severely mauled the marauder of merchant ships, it was high time for the enemy to get away out of this awkward trap into which the Nazi had so suddenly placed himself.

The senior officer of this British squadron (Captain H. H. Harwood, R.N.) who flew his flag in the *Exeter*, had since 1938 been in charge of the South

American Division of the America and West Indies Station, to which also *Ajax* (Captain C. H. L. Woodhouse, R.N.), was attached, but the *Achilles* had come from the New Zealand Division. These three were under way when the enemy was first sighted and orders were signalled for *Ajax* and *Achilles* to go full speed and converge on the German battleship.

For Langsdorff it was quite a new role to be the attacked rather than the attacker.

The second shot from *Exeter* showed that Captain Langsdorff was going to have a foe very different from the ten merchant ships. Not a walk-over this: not a mere matter of bluff, bluster, and bullying. But hard business.

The *Achilles* (7030 tons) was armed with eight 6-inch and four 6-inch high-angle guns as also was the *Ajax* (6985 tons) though of the 4-inch she carried eight. The *Exeter* however mounted six 8-inch and four 4-inch. At a range of 12½ miles *Exeter's* second shot was a direct hit on the Nazi's control tower. At the first German gunnery was excellent, but just as in the last war we soon found the enemy's shooting became ragged, so the *Admiral Graf Spee* was not long in developing inaccuracy.

The *Exeter's* navigator at that time was Lieut.-Commander J. Bowman-Manifold, R.N., who had been serving in the ship nearly two years. This morning he had been summoned to the bridge from his cabin in such a hurry that he was still wearing pyjamas. As he stood leaning over the compass, only fifteen minutes after the action began, one German shell arrived which killed him and eight marines. It was the battleship's fifth salvo.

But the range varied, for Commander R. R. Graham, who before the action ended was carrying in his body fifteen pieces of Nazi shell, said that the distance came down to as little as 8000 yards. If the engagement was somewhat fierce, causing the *Exeter* eventually to drop out considerably damaged, the raider likewise had suffered considerably. And altogether some 36 Nazis were killed and 60 seriously wounded. But the *Admiral Graf Spee* had also her aeroplane shot to pieces, and the fact is that externally the control tower bore many marks of damage, while the hull itself was shell-pocked above the waterline.

Still more noteworthy was the moral effect, for these raw seamen who had come out to witness mercantile sinkings had discovered that three lighter displacement British units with their well-rehearsed manoeuvre of darting in and out with the laying of smoke-screens that confused the German gunners spoke in language that alarmed landsmen never brought up to the sea. Moreover, the sight of dead and wounded comrades was such that the possibility of one more naval engagement with the British could not be contemplated. So it was generally advisable for Langsdorff that he was hurrying his ship that day into Montevideo. Besides supplies, the ship would now require urgent repairs.

And the future looked none too good.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT FAILURE

INSIDE Montevideo harbour the Germans knew that their supply-ship *Tacoma* was waiting and she happened to be another of those vessels that were oil-driven, with a short funnel and two masts. Having plenty of length, she had so ordinary an appearance that no one would suspect her as an enemy tender; but she had such ample space for carrying liquid fuel and room for so many tons of stores that Langsdorff had been looking forward to meeting her.

The estuary of the River Plate passes along the Uruguayan coast so closely that the latter, about 7 p.m. on the evening of December 13, when the *Admiral Graf Spee* was coming in, was marked by spectators anxious to learn something of the raider's sensational story. Before reaching Montevideo, Uruguay's capital and one of the best-built cities in South America, there was much along the shore to welcome a mariner fresh from weeks of strenuous cruising. Bathing beaches, the approaching sight of imposing buildings drenched by sunlight; the distant cathedral and university, public parks and rows of trees lined the northern shore with singular attractiveness.

The outer harbour and entrance channel glistening in the sunlight, the quays sweltering in the December heat (which corresponds to our month of June), suggested little of war and slaughter. On the way up the River Plate the *Admiral Graf Spee*, a few miles short of Montevideo, had passed barely three miles from the Punta del Este, where a well-known seaside resort on the peninsula forms a natural grandstand for those who would be interested by the passing of a German battleship so lately knocked about. Here is the main—and the most practicable—channel of entry to the shallow muddy waters of the Plate. For over a hundred miles this route runs contiguous with the Uruguayan coast, and it is to be noted that aboard this *Graf Spee* was the navigating officer of a crack German liner which many a time had brought his ship along here.

But such inter-connection between her Navy and Mercantile Marine was typically German, and between the two wars ex-German naval officers serving in German South American liners used to boast openly of their former naval employment.

It was a curious coincidence that when earlier that day the *Graf Spee* had been about to molest the small French S.S. *Formose* further out in the Atlantic this vessel chanced to have on board the furniture and personal belongings of Dr. Alberto Guani; for in late December 1914 this same diplomatist—at that time Uruguayan Minister at Brussels—had crossed over the Atlantic, being obliged to abandon his diplomatic post by the invading Germans. In November 1918 he returned to accompany King Albert on his triumphal return to Brussels.

And now Dr. Guani's possessions in 1939 were coming back to Uruguay. British cruisers had saved the *Formose* and just before 11 p.m. the raider brought up in Montevideo Harbour. Aboard her were still 62 British prisoners: 6 officers and 56 men. A German officer opened the door of their quarters.

"You are now free," he announced.

Formalities having been gone through, they were next day given their liberty.

They had indeed been living through trying times. They had listened to the sounds of battle above and come through the engagement with our cruisers unscathed. They had nothing to complain of Langsdorff's treatment, but we know that it was on board the notorious prison ship (about which we shall speak presently) that our mariners suffered so brutally.

Now these 62 British came ashore alive and fit just about the same time that the *Graf Spee's* seriously wounded were taken off to the Uruguayan military hospital. At the latter, emergency preparations had been made for receiving 200 wounded. On the previous night it had been expected that Commodore Harwood would be sending his injured men, but by a wise, if Spartan, decision the *Exeter* had been sent three days southward at reduced speed to the Falkland Isles.

One who saw the battleship *Graf Spee* from a distance of 400 yards tells me that she did not appear to have suffered much material injury, apart from the damaged aeroplane and a few shell-holes; but then it was learnt of the 36 dead Germans, the 60 seriously wounded, and that the vital blow caused by the bursting of a shell inside the control tower had caused damage which could not be repaired in South America. Furthermore, the ship's galleys had been blown to bits: without them meals for the crew could not have been possible, and at the most the battleship could only have made a dash to some other port.

Gradually Captain Langsdorff was being made to realize that his pleasant and prosperous weeks had come to a sudden end. His ship needed repairs so badly that he could see the horns of a dilemma shaping themselves. However much he pretended to delude himself, however strongly his own country bluffed, bounced or bullied, he would shortly be faced by two alternatives: internment in Montevideo, or annihilation outside by British warships. The *Admiral Graf Spee* had surely run her course: the day of reckoning was coming.

To have the vessel put into good condition would mean shipwrights, and that in turn would necessitate first-class men and plenty of time. The British Ambassador, Sir Eugen Millington-Drake, on instructions from our Secretary of State, addressed a Note to the Uruguayan Government requesting that the *Admiral Graf Spee* should be obliged to leave at the expiry of 24 hours in accordance with International Law on the ground that the damage suffered was not accidental, or from stress of weather.

It was like the position of a peaceable farmer who suddenly finds in his backyard a large bear that has escaped from a menagerie and is told that he must turn the beast out. However, the Government sent their naval experts on board to assess the damage done to the vessel's seaworthiness—not her fighting power. But the Germans were careful not to show that control tower to the assessors.

In the end the Uruguayan Government did not demand the *Graf Spee's* departure within the 24 hours, but the experts in their report judged that to make the ship seaworthy could be done within 72 hours. Langsdorff was officially notified at eight o'clock on that Thursday night and therefore at eight o'clock on Sunday night she must either leave or be interned.

The hands of fate were beginning to move.

On Friday morning the 36 German dead in their coffins were landed, and

it is a matter of photographic fact that though they were received by German ministers of religion giving the usual Nazi salute, Captain Langsdorff saluted with a naval officer's usual manner—in fact as an officer of the old Hohenzollern Navy, i.e. with hand to cap. Not with open palm.

Why? We shall inquire presently.

Meanwhile the mortal remains of the German casualties were conveyed through the streets of Montevideo with every solemnity amid the respectful silence of the populace and of our mariners once captives. Typically Hunnish, and generally admitted as a wicked lie, was the Nazi statement that these British sailormen deemed it worth while on such an occasion to exhortate on the coffins. Only a German would invent such infamy, and even the local German residents of Montevideo knew that our compatriots would never stoop so low.

On the other hand—as the civilized world already learned with the passing of time—the German mind always was on the lookout to act treacherously; but the British Ambassador acted very much for his own country's interests in making representations against improper assistance from outside being given for repairing. It should be stated at once to the credit of the principal Uruguayan shipyard that they refused to take part in such repair work for the German raider; but also it is worth mentioning that the Uruguayan Minister for Foreign Affairs at Montevideo was that same Dr. Alberto Guani with whom the British Ambassador-to-be (of 1939) travelled aboard the *Formosa* in December 1914. Between these two diplomats there had existed for many years both complete understanding and mutual confidence.

It is not necessary to emphasize how Great Britain and her Navy may find, on delicate occasions such as here mentioned, the value of assistance coming from a special sphere. Commodore Harwood and his ships had so far done everything possible, but Langsdorff, having been so foolish as to take Iris *Graf Spee* inside this neutral harbour, must not be allowed to escape in a hurry. Why? Because the British Navy was determined to give the Nazi the most complete reception. Though the damaged *Exeter* was now on her way to the Falklands, her place below the horizon of the River Plate would be taken by H.M.S. *Cumberland*, a slightly larger cruiser of about the same speed. And racing across the Atlantic were other units who would arrive in time for the kill if only the raider could be prevented from making her departure a little too soon.

Such a German trick was quite possible but already foreseen. The Nazi commanding officer might be a smart fellow, but our Naval Attaché accredited to the three countries of Brazil, the Argentine and Uruguay, had long been known as a very live wire. For some years the office was held by Captain P. J. Mack, R.N., who had earned a high reputation, but now he had recently gone afloat again in command of the flotilla leader H.M.S. *Jervis*, aboard which he was about to win the D.S.O. and a halo of glory in the Mediterranean for his gallantry in fighting the Italian Navy. That fine story, however, belongs to another place.

There is a rule of International Law that if a belligerent merchant ship sailed from a port in which was sheltering a warship belonging to an enemy government, the warship must not be allowed to leave before a period of 24 hours should elapse. It is a sort of cat-and-mouse regulation by which the mouse merchantman would have a clear 24 hours start. Captain

H. W. U. McCall, R.N. (who had recently succeeded Captain Mack as Naval Attaché) therefore arranged for the sailing from Montevideo of a British merchantman as soon as possible, and this ship left on Friday afternoon shortly after 5 p.m. That would at least delay the *Graf Spee's* departure for 24 hours and help our naval concentration outside. An exceedingly clever bit of work. But, to do this job doubly well, it was arranged to send out of port another mercantile vessel on the Saturday—she actually left at 6.15 p.m., and since *Graf Spee* had to depart not earlier than 6.15 p.m. on Sunday and not later than 8 p.m. the enemy had been compelled to reduce her time of departure to 1½ hours.

That would be of the greatest convenience for His Majesty's ships waiting outside. So far, then, the Nazis had shewn themselves intellectually of inferior calibre. They were being defeated every minute of their stay in Montevideo, and Nazi bombast would suffer some more. Langsdorff would soon have that noose round his neck more tightly still.

The one great fear worrying our people in the British Embassy just then was that the *Graf Spee* might make a bolt in the early hours of the following morning just when the usual slight mist preceded dawn. In fact there seemed some indication that she might be about to get under way, and she had been taking oil aboard from the *Tacoma*, whose arrival had not long preceded the raider. The supply-ship had obviously adapted her sea movements to fit in with the place and time of Langsdorff's arrival, but now that the Nazi battleship looked like breaking out, the British Embassy used every endeavour to get a naval guard placed aboard the *Graf Spee*, or to have small Uruguayan patrol boats lashed alongside so that the German could not be able to sail without committing violence.

All day the British Ambassador was presenting this argument, and it was after midnight when accompanied by the Naval Attaché he paid his last visit to Dr. Guani with this firm request. That request the Uruguayan Minister received with sympathy, and even in the presence of Sir Eugen Millington-Drake he telephoned the Minister of National Defence to see whether this suggestion of a naval guard could be given approval. But the reply came in the negative, as a warship in a neutral harbour retains her sovereignty so long as she is not interned.

By Saturday afternoon matters aboard the battleship were taking a certain trend. What exactly was happening? One theory* is that in place of their previous cocksureness this German crew—at the thought of their English enemies waiting expectant beyond the River Plate to knock *Graf Spee's* hull into a hopeless wreck—were now fast becoming inclined to be mutinous and resolved they would not take their ship to sea. Hitherto they had found pleasure in sinking British merchantmen, but Nazi sailors had not come out to act as targets for British cruisers.

Thirty-six dead and 60 heavily wounded? There would be many more this time.

Since they refused to obey, they were harangued first by one officer and then another. At least eight times that afternoon between 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. the recalcitrants mustered on deck defiantly. Finally Captain Langsdorff made a personal appeal to the men, but he succeeded no better,

* Reports of the *Admiral Graf Spee's* crew becoming insubordinate were confirmed by observers aboard the merchant ships *Lynton Grange* and *Trehieve* and other vessels who were moored close to the Nazi battleship in Montevideo Harbour.

and the once victorious raider had to admit defeat. About 8 p.m. he went ashore and consulted with the German Minister.

It is but fair to add that Sir Eugen Millington-Drake, and most of the Uruguayans, did not credit the story of a mutiny having occurred. On the other hand this particular version was related by numbers of seafarers who lay close to the *Graf Spee* and listened to the indignant clamour of the men.

It is not disputed that there was unusual stir on board, that amidst all this activity and the multitude of orders being given, Captain Langsdorff made more than one telephonic communication with Hitler, but the opinion is held that preparations were now being made for the greater part of the crew to leave the ship and probably because of the irreparable damage to the most modern technical apparatus. For if Langsdorff intended not to issue forth and put up a fair fight, apparently he was not going to let confidential gadgets become known to the British Navy.

That Saturday evening was memorable, but something of great drama was to take place 24 hours later, though exactly how and what was not foreseen ashore.

Evidently Langsdorff, conscious that his day of victory was long since passed, had cabled Hitler for advice, and about midnight received a reply in which the Führer ordered the Nazi Captain to take the battleship out of harbour and scuttle herself. What a blow for the officer who returned gloomily on board!

During the first part of Sunday all repair work was suddenly suspended and nothing of any note seemed to occur until early in the afternoon a considerable number of her people were noticed leaving *Graf Spee* and transferred to the *Tacoma*. They numbered 970 officers and sullen men, but 60 remained in the battleship.

What was happening now? In a very few hours surely the *Graf Spee* was due to leave harbour? When this afternoon Sir Eugen went to call on Dr. Guani, the latter was found in conference there with all the Latin-American Ambassadors and Ministers accredited to the Uruguayan Government resident in Montevideo. To them he was fully explaining the various developments and asking for their moral support, which in several cases had already been promised. Brazil had made a concentration of her Air Force on her southern frontier some 200 or 300 miles to the northward of Montevideo ready to proceed to the rescue in any emergency.

It must be remembered that at this period the general official attitude of the 21 republics in the Pan-American Union (including the United States) was isolationist, and they regarded the Battle of the River Plate as a violation of both the 300-mile Security Zone and of the waters of the River Plate estuary, which Uruguay and Argentina considered as their joint territorial waters.

Every hour of that beautiful Sunday afternoon local excitement in Montevideo was rising with the summer heat. Crowds were gathering to witness the climax to this suspense which could not long be delayed. Never had popular excitement so rapidly reached boiling-point, and the entire city was waiting either along the wide coastal promenade or from the heights of the flat roof-tops. For instance, standing on the highest skyscraper, some who were looking down on the placid harbour at 6.15 p.m. saw the *Graf Spee* get under way from her berth.

The 72 hours were ending, the raider seemed to be bound seawards, but

three specks on the horizon indicated that our cruisers were ready to give the knock-out. Disgruntled young Nazi seamen, left behind, watched their battleship turn northwards to take the narrow channel towards Buenos Aires, and noted that this lay more or less diagonally across the estuary some 150 miles. Suddenly it began to strike the spectators that *Graf Spee* did not intend emerging from the estuary, but was about to make a dash for internment at Buenos Aires.

To others it seemed even more probable that Langsdorff with his skeleton crew would make a spectacular 'death-or-glory' dash southwards out of the Plate into the Argentine port of Bahia Blanca and there intern herself. The *Tacoma* had followed out after the *Graf Spee* and the populace wondered whether this supply-ship was destined to surrender herself to the British cruisers. It was all somewhat complicating and uncertain, and the setting sun casting its rays over the now breeze-ruffled waters did not clarify matters. The battleship eased down and stopped; there ensued a wait, two small launches which the raider normally stowed amidships abaft the funnel were seen to be leaving the *Admiral Graf Spee's* side and making towards *Tacoma*. One hour and a half since the start thus quickly passed, when a further development occurred at eight minutes to eight.

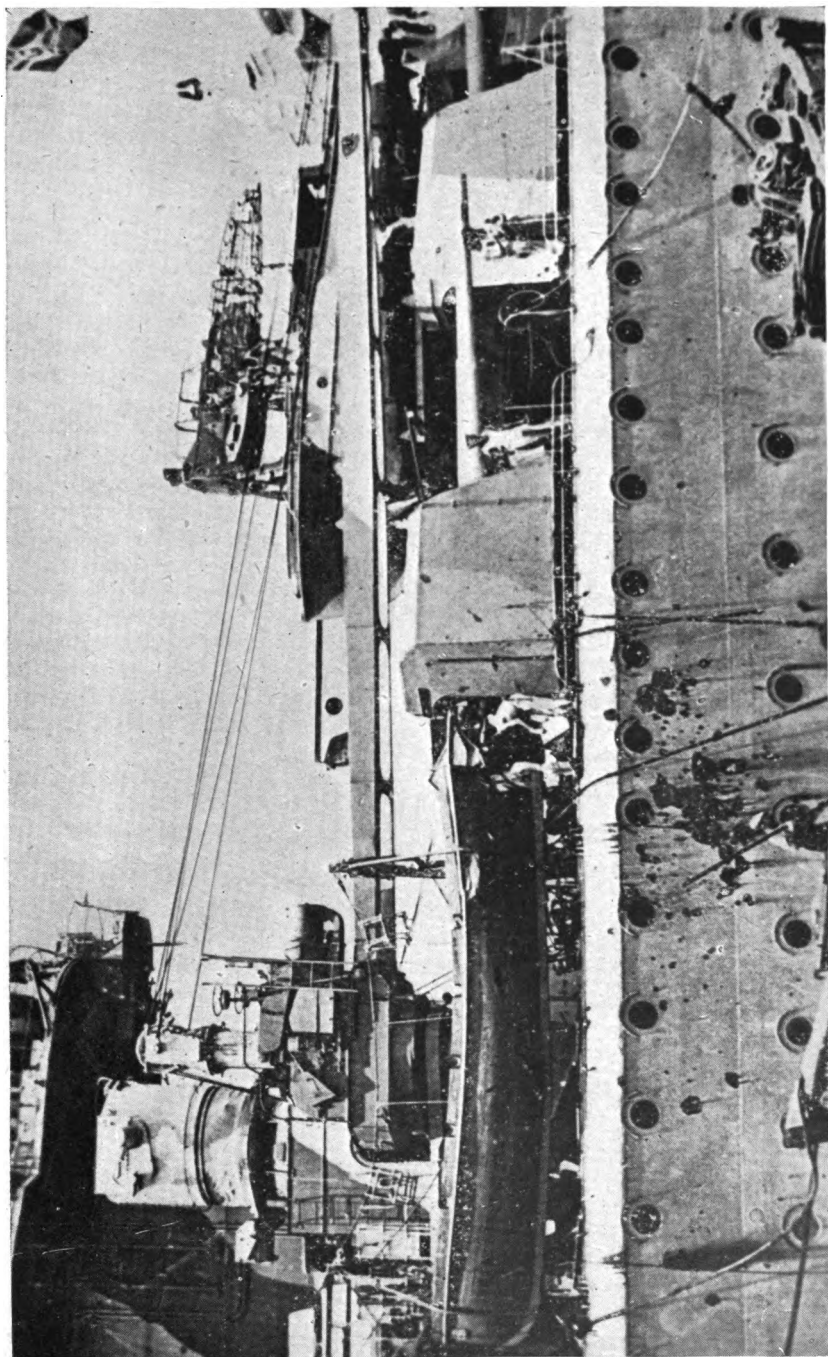
Suddenly a huge column of dark brown smoke rose from the battleship and mushroomed out.

One more mysterious proceeding! Some who focused their glasses on to the object imagined that after all the enemy did intend going to sea, but that she would first make a smoke-screen and then hurry seaward after spending the remaining minutes of daylight in territorial waters. At any rate, our three cruisers were prepared that something definite was about to happen, for evidently they also emitted a smoke-cloud and were visibly on the move.

After three or four minutes a great flame shot up through the raider's smoke canopy, followed by a deep boom and a heavy explosion. Lesser flashes and explosions then gave further punctuation and shortly afterwards the *Admiral Graf Spee* could be seen burning fiercely against the background of a cloudy sunset. From stem to stern the conflagration of what once was a smart man-of-war darted yellow flames and made a grandiose spectacle for landmen on the roof-tops or for seamen coming up the estuary.

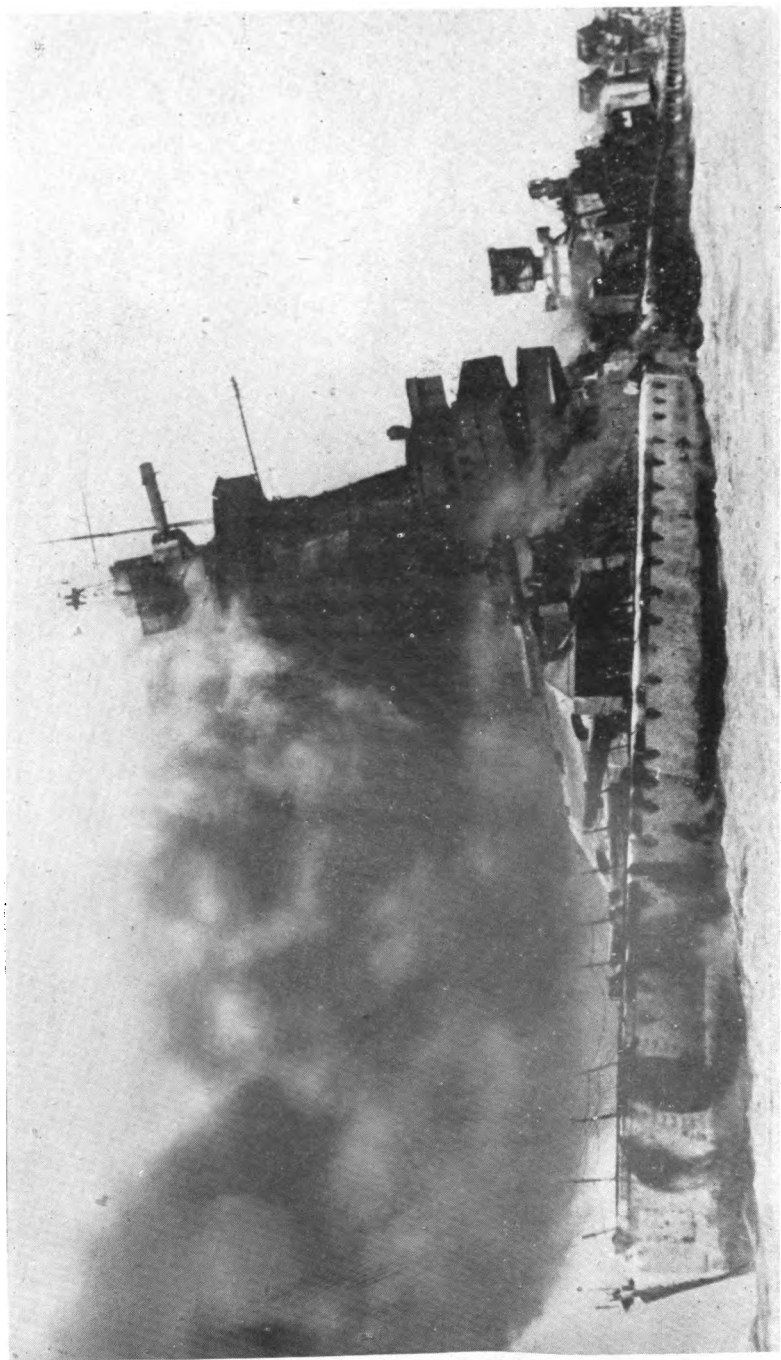
This sudden transformation of a previously successful bully into a blatant wreck came to the crowd's imagination as a great shock. They supposed that Hitler had added one more crime to his career in allowing a number of Nazi sailors thus to perish, but actually the last of the explosion party had left the ship in those two small launches. Among the persons who finally left the ship was Captain Langsdorff, who is said to have departed reluctantly and preferred to go down with the *Graf Spee*.

Whether the German Captain really was in an heroic mood at the moment is a little uncertain and is based on a rumour. Certainly he seems to have been respected by our mariners whom he had taken prisoners, and him they regarded as a gentleman though an enemy. Possibly the least uncharitable judgment is to say that Langsdorff realized that the cruisers had outfought him, and any further action must result in complete defeat. That the conversation on the telephone with Hitler added to his worries, and that in spite of the local German colony in Montevideo Langsdorff lacked complete popularity, cannot be denied. No seaman could possibly be in a happy



AFTER ACTION WITH H.M.S. EXETER

After the action with British men-of-war in South American waters the *Admiral Graf Spee*, though not exhibiting the full war-scars, shows that at least one shell has burst against the hull, and that at least one more has wiped out an aeroplane aft.



THE ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE

will be seen aground and awaiting her self-immolation, still flying the flag whilst the German naval officer declines to go forth and face his foe.

mood when contemplating the wreck of his ship, but Langsdorff might have entertained the same sympathy when he sank British merchantmen.

The British Minister, Sir Eugen Millington-Drake, who witnessed the *Graf Spee's felo-de-se*, picked up the telephone a few minutes later and getting through to the cable office dictated a short telegram *en clair* to Whitehall stating that he himself had witnessed *Graf Spee* blow herself up some five miles from land. It was hoped that as the time in Montevideo was about 8 p.m., and midnight in London, the good news would reach the B.B.C. just before the latter closed down for the night, so that a great part of the British public would go to bed happy.

Next morning many photographs were taken in the River Plate of the still smoking wreck, and the best of them were despatched to Buenos Aires where there happened to be apparatus for telephotographing them to London. Thus was Sunday evening's suicide of a notorious German ship seen in our papers of Tuesday morning.

In the meanwhile *Tacoma* began to change her role as supply-ship, and indeed this story of the *Graf Spee*, like so many Hitlerian episodes, goes from one infamous chapter to another. The *Tacoma* moved out a little further into the River Plate with the *Graf Spee's* sullen men aboard, transferring almost all of them, including Captain Langsdorff, to some tugs and barges which had been sent specially by a German-Argentine Company in Buenos Aires, where they were landed on Monday morning and interned.

We may regard this landing not at Uruguay as a distinct compliment to the pro-Ally sentiments of the Uruguayan Government and people who even at that stage had no wish for the raider's crew to be interned within their gates. Which of us does not know that for mental clumsiness and heavy-handed deficiency of tact the German is the most stupid creature alive? Courtesy, delicate procedure, and respect for others' feelings in a situation that requires something finer than blunt untruths, were impossible for the German mind. We have watched the Nazi failure to make good on the Sunday evening. Not content with their heavy-handed failure then, they followed this up immediately by an act of atrocious bad taste and undiplomatic falsity of assertion. For on the Monday morning there appeared in the Uruguayan papers a kind of open letter bearing the signature of Captain Langsdorff complaining that the Uruguayan Government had not allowed him more time to effect repairs. The general opinion was that this letter had been written actually not by him but by the German Minister in Montevideo and the German Ambassador in Buenos Aires—for the latter had come over—and it had the effect of causing great indignation.

Now the Uruguayan Government held the view that it had not merely been very reasonable but generous in granting the *Graf Spee* 72 hours, which were to run from the time of its notification, i.e. nearly 24 hours after she had arrived. Furthermore this letter over Langsdorff's name stated that he had scrupulously abstained from any threat of force such as would have been within his 'technical capacity'. This phrase in particular caused immense indignation, rivalled only by that notorious telegram in the last war when the German Minister in Buenos Aires telegraphing his Government recommended that certain Argentine vessels proceeding with grain to Europe should be 'sunk without trace'.

Langsdorff, instead of accepting his present position as unfortunate and to be borne with resignation and humility as the fortune of war, rebelled at

the criticisms which reached him. Uruguayan indignation met him with direct accusation when he might have expected praise and sympathy if better advised. A large and wealthy German colony in Buenos Aires at once began telling him that he had failed to keep up the tradition of the sea by not going down with his ship. The very people who were prepared to have been his admirers now regarded him as a despicable person to be cold-shouldered: this was not a welcome sailor to be greeted with hospitality.

The raider had done for himself.

And by his own instructions he had left the battleship to sink deeper into the estuary's alluvial mud as a discreditable memorial to the Nazis' first raider of the war; but Langsdorff shewed next morning that he was not one of those sailors who could bear the storm of disappointment, the gale which comes after the soft zephyrs of success. They found him the next morning shot by his own hand, his body wrapped—not in the Nazi ensign which had flown from the *Graf Spee's* stern but in the flag of the old German Empire. It was he, remember, who had saluted his dead seamen not with the Nazi open palm but with fingers to his cap.

We may continue to wonder whether this German naval officer really and sincerely was a devotee of Hitler.

For months afterwards vessels passing up and down the River Plate could gaze upon the wreck of *Graf Spee*, still visible after the explosion. Although blown up with that violent explosion, the remains of the raider had gradually subsided in the estuary silt, and the River Plate's waters have always been so dark brown with the mud that divers could never below the surface see more than eight inches. But, besides that crew having been condemned to internment, it should be added that the *Tacoma* presently was similarly treated as *Graf Spee's* auxiliary. Later, in 1942, she was taken over by the Uruguayan Government for their own use.

A fine, modern ship of about 10,000 tons, with large tanks for carrying oil-fuel and considerable space for refrigerating storage, she had afforded every possible help for the raider to cruise during three or four months independent of the shore: but this change of ownership was made as a reprisal for the sinking of a Uruguayan vessel in the Caribbean Sea.

Commodore Harwood had been on the station for two years and during his periodical visits to Montevideo had won considerable popularity locally, but nearly three weeks after the double suicide of the *Graf Spee* and her commanding officer, Commodore (promoted now to Rear-Admiral) Harwood arrived with *Ajax* and *Achilles* at Montevideo for a visit of 48 hours in accordance with the neutrality regulations. There could have been no sort of doubt that had this visit been paid within three or four days after the action, the expression of the Uruguayan people's pro-democracy and pro-Britain sentiments would have been difficult to contain; and it was only out of consideration for the country's embarrassment that the British cruisers delayed coming to Montevideo. But even now large crowds gathered to give a hearty welcome in the port and in their enthusiasm broke through the police cordon. Furthermore, a large group of Uruguayans known as 'Friends of England' entertained the British Admiral, welcoming him in an eloquent speech. We all know that Admiral Harwood (who was also rewarded with a K.C.B.) brought his ship safely home, was given an appointment at the Admiralty, whence he was sent, in 1942, to Alexandria as successor to Admiral Cunningham in command of the Mediterranean Fleet.

If, then, the raider *Admiral Graf Spee* with her supply ship *Tacoma* fade out of the picture; if both Captain Langsdorff and his crew were likewise destined not to leave South American waters; we have still to relate what happened to the tanker which had been despatched in September 1939 down the South Atlantic to rendezvous Langsdorff and act as prison ship. What about her fate?

She was commanded by Captain Dau of the German Mercantile Marine—one of those dour, stern, bleak-faced Nazis who seem barely human. He first appears on the scene when the *Graf Spee* had sunk the *Trevannion* in the South Atlantic on October 21. The latter's Master (Captain J. E. Edwards), although eventually compelled to give in to the raider's gunfire, was able to broadcast the ship's position before the wireless was shot away, and Captain Edwards managed to throw his code-book and some confidential Naval documents into the sea at the last minute under the very eyes of the raider. At first his ship's company were imprisoned aboard the *Graf Spee* but later transferred to Captain Dau's vessel, then as the latter was already overcrowded these prisoners came back to the *Graf Spee*. Captain Edwards complained that the food was both inadequate and putrid: but also he noted that the battleship raider's officers were a poor lot who delighted in their boasting—yes, until Commodore Harwood chased the *Graf Spee*, when some of the Nazis distinguished themselves by their hysteria and exhibition of extreme fear.

For weeks after that River Plate action the world forgot the existence of Captain Dau and his prison ship, yet, not having followed the raider into Montevideo, he found his way stealthily up the Atlantic, rounded the British Isles, and after hugging the Iceland coast stood across towards the rocky fjords of Norway. It was now the month of February 1940, so he had followed the advice of *Möwe* and other raiders of the last war to make their return voyage in the winter not later than March and to go so far north till they could sight Iceland before heading south-east.

But the British Government knew of Captain Dau's progress. Just as in the last war they had quietly watched Karl Spindler bringing guns and all sorts of supplies for Casement a few days preceding that Easter Rebellion in Ireland of 1916 and then at the last minute captured Karl Spindler, ship, supplies and all off the west Irish coast; so Captain Dau with his vessel full of our mariners was watched and trapped more neatly than if the incident came out of a novel.

The middle-aged Dau with his grey moustache and stubbly beard was loathed by his own men, and even during this voyage northward from the South Atlantic he sentenced his ship's carpenter to 21 days because the latter had talked to the English prisoner-sailors of what actually happened to the *Graf Spee*.

On the night of Thursday, February 15, 1940, just three months after the River Plate battle, the R.A.F. patrolling Norwegian coastline received news that next day they ought to sight 'something' of interest, and that 'something' was spelled by seven letters.

This Admiralty—plus R.A.F.—co-operation was a great idea.

Three aircraft were on patrol, and at 6 a.m. of the 16th the leader of the three was roused to find a lovely bright day beneath him, gorgeous wintry sunshine with blue sky and a visibility of 40 miles; snow covering Norway's mountains, but the sea frozen hard wherever it adjoined the land.

Having thoroughly combed the seascape, an object now very clearly defined seemed to 'answer to the description' of the 'something of interest'. Yes, she was a vessel with a cruiser stern and short funnel aft. Down flew the aircraft . . . examined this grey hull . . . even spelled out her name on the stern.

It had seven letters. *ALTMARK*, they spelled gleefully. "We've found her at last!"

The missing prison ship. The one-time tanker from the South Atlantic! So closely was she shadowed that Captain Dau might have guessed that he, too, was getting into a sticky mess. By the time the short daylight was ending this bad-tempered Nazi was trying to hide the *Altmark* in the narrow Norwegian Joessing Fjord; but presently in the darkness of this congested ice-frozen refuge arrived also the British destroyer *Cossack*, commanded by that exceptionally gallant Captain P. L. Vian, who was later destined to win the D.S.O. three times and also to receive a knighthood for his services at sea; who also presently persistently did brave things with our convoys in the Mediterranean.

This evening, with smart seamanship, despite the German's blinding searchlight and Captain Dau's endeavours within that awkward fjord to ram the destroyer, Captain Vian brought his destroyer alongside *Altmark* and sent a boarding party on to the latter's decks. In the brief contest seven of the enemy perished and only one of our men received mortal wounds; but the crux of the triumph—the crowning incident to the *Graf Spee's* unfortunate cruise—was when over the *Altmark's* hatches a British bluejacket from the *Cossack* shouted down below:

"Any Englishmen here?"

And then 299 captured sailors, who had endured many weeks of durance vile, bad food, and the long voyage under Dau's command, answered the question joyously. Leaping aboard the *Cossack*, they steamed that night across the North Sea as free men and next day landed at Leith.

It was a bitter disappointment for Nazis that the *Altmark* was robbed of her prey at the very last stage when so close to Germany. Of course the enemy by wireless sought to cover the affair with typical Nazi untruths, but powerful is truth and in the end it will always prevail. At first Germany described *Altmark* as "an inoffensive merchantman", but they quite forgot what we emphasized on an earlier page that in the *List of Coast and Ship Stations* issued at Berne by the International Union of Telegraphic and Wireless Communications *Altmark's* name was given crossed swords, indicating that she was a German auxiliary warship.

The Germans had lied gloriously but could not keep up the pace.

On February 19 more truthfully they now called the *Altmark* a Government ship."

Thus, to clew up a long story, one may inquire what was the nett result of the *Graf Spee's* excursion; of her supply and prison ships. To whom had been this raiding of any profit in the end? Were the giving back of every British seafarer, the self-destruction of *Graf Spee*, and the surrender of *Tacoma* balanced by the sinking of a few of our merchantmen? People who suffer ill-treatment possess long memories, and though sailors are the least vindictive of humans; those 299 who for weeks had been kept cooped down below decks in hot weather and cold alike, rarely were allowed out for an hour's exercise in the fresh air, but always kept in their dismal confinement

when near the British Isles, and at all times of their imprisonment never were fed more luxuriously than off black bread and sugarless tea minus milk; these will fail to forget their host's ungracious treatment.

This beginning of Germany's raiding of our sea-borne commerce was an immense failure, and the Nazis in their campaign by surface ships against our Mercantile Marine had still many things to relearn.

CHAPTER V

CONVOYS AND CARGO SHIPS

It is curious to observe the reluctance with which one generation will consent to learn from its predecessors. To the citizens of ancient Rome nothing was more valuable than the supply of corn which used to arrive in Italy every season from Egypt. Just as England depends very largely for her grain coming from across the ocean, so not less than one-third of ancient Rome's corn supply from Alexandria depended on ships of about 280-tons cargo capacity coming across the Mediterranean. For mutual protection they sailed usually together, but as further protection against pirates, two naval fleets were also appointed.

Thus one fleet was based on the modern Pozzuoli (Gulf of Naples), while for the corn carriers coming up the Adriatic there was the naval base at Ravenna, and a 'Classis Alexandrina' protected them off the North African coast. The present principle of ensuring safety by (1) cover, and (2) convoy, was thus relied upon. St. Paul himself had personal experience of a wheat ship which was so big that she carried 276 passengers. We do not forget that after being wrecked at Malta he set forth in another Alexandrine corn vessel which duly reached Puteoli, or (as we today speak of it) Pozzuoli.

Pass over the centuries, and we find ourselves in the year 1372. English kings and princes delighted in what we should speak of as Bordeaux wine, and at this date Edward III arranged that at vintage-time wine ships should be sent to Gascony for the filled barrels, but these were to be convoyed till reaching England by 20 vessels "all furnished as if for war" under the two Admirals, Philip de Courteney and William de Nevill.

In like manner during 1695 a trade defence squadron was introduced to afford protection of our merchant shipping against the Dutch; and finally in 1798 comes the passing of the Convoy Act giving an official status to such protection, so that unless thus protected no ship could start out on her voyage from a British port. Is not our history of the sea during the Napoleonic wars largely made up of gallant fights by the old East Indiamen?

There is not a naval-print collector today who has failed to include some such incident as that of Captain Nathaniel Dance when, having been put in charge of 16 East Indiamen and another 40 also, he fought against five ships of the French Admiral Linois' squadron and caused the enemy to break off the engagement. That was in 1804. Another well-known picture depicts a

squadron of East Indiamen sailing in convoy from St. Helena a quarter of a century later, escorted by naval help.

Such phases of our naval history are so eternally wrapped up in our proud annals, yet throughout most of the last war the word 'convoy' was almost banished from our vocabulary. It is true that during the autumn of 1914 troop transports numbering 30 steamers came across the Indian Ocean into the Red Sea escorted by cruisers, and another convoy was associated with H.M.S. *Sydney*. Nevertheless such a journeying together of so many units was unique. A curious disrespect for the past, a prejudice that steamers could never cruise in company and avoid collisions at night, gave the final discouragement to any revival of the convoy notion.

"Never mind past history! We live at a period when steam is triumphant!"

That was the usual argument. The Navy had made up its mind, and so had Masters in the Merchant Service. Station-keeping would be utterly impracticable, seeing that not two ships would have the same speed, nor the same fuel endurance. And what about the straggler that would endanger the rest? The lame duck which could not regain her position after doing temporary repairs?

But, despite all these moans, the experiment was tried at the end of 1917 in regard to coal convoys between Great Britain and France, and so successful did they prove that notwithstanding submarines, fog, gales of wind and other difficulties, 16,693 vessels between then and the end of hostilities were escorted in this formation, and 16,537 of these actually reached port. It was admitted by the Germans after the close of war that the convoy system was one of the four British devices which finally prevailed over the U-boats.

When, in 1939, this second war began, it was not immediately possible to reintroduce the convoy system, yet so successfully had it been previously dragged from the dim past to benefit even big tonnage, that within a few weeks of the new hostilities the historic usage which had been the custom among mariners for two thousand years began again—not immediately on every route, but gradually.

There are in this war certain details of difference which distinguish the enemy's attacks against our shipping. The U-boats (speaking generally) operate hundreds of miles from our shores; there are more surface raiders than previously; and instead of the very few aircraft these flyers are in greater numbers and encountered well out in the Atlantic. On the other hand, the commerce plunderer started when the pocket-battleships with powerful guns began having matters fairly easily. Then the converted German mercantile raiders took up the running, with less certainty.

More complicated, too, is the master mariner's voyage in a convoy. In the last war it was very rare that an ocean passage would be interrupted except when a U-boat appeared near a steamer making the land. Today anything may occur at any stage of the voyage from submarines, aeroplanes, surface ships, but mines laid from the sky may also be found near the harbour approach.

German long-range aircraft began to set forth on their attacks from the French west coast about July 1940, flying well out to sea after the fall of France, and one of the earliest victims of their low-flying bomb attacks was that of the *Empress of Britain*. It has to be admitted that our convoys were

lacking in anti-aircraft equipment and expert gunners, therefore convoys formed too easy a target for the long-range Focke-Wulf and were too conspicuous for the U-boats on the lookout, or when called up by these aviators' wireless.

But it is common knowledge that a vast new organization for air protection of the Merchant Navy was entrusted to Admiral Sir Frederick Dreyer, with good results. For it gradually became exceptional that a Focke-Wulf approached within range of a convoy and its escorts. On December 19, 1941, for instance, two of these aircraft were destroyed and a third damaged by some of our naval aircraft which operated from ships provided for defence.

Balloons tethered to moving convoys were introduced comparatively early, but the use of catapults sending aeroplanes into the sky as additional escort has been one of the most significant changes in the whole history of protection. To provide some adequate means of defending the cargo vessel against aerial raiders was at first quite a problem: the submarine we had even in the last war learned to terrorize by means of the depth-charge. But bombs dropped from the clouds seemed at one time to suggest a difficulty which could not be overcome. Even if you provided certain aircraft which would rise from the hull and defeat the Focke-Wulf, what would ultimately happen?

The answer is that the aviator either baled out or would be content to 'pancake' his machine on to the sea, hoping presently to be picked up by one of the escorts or convoy; and if there happened to be a shore base within easy distance the airman would fly back to land. It is undeniable that the value of these aircraft has been considerable, and we have been laying down principles for future development.

What is loosely called the Battle of the Atlantic, but more accurately the Battle of the Seas, is a proposition of varying success. Whether the enemy forces be of aerial planes, submarines, or surface raiders, we still have our existence on the sea; everything depends on if this hostile strength can be so arranged as to make itself be felt considerably at a certain spot.

We spoke just now of routeing. Well, an ocean is so vast that any concentration of U-boats, any number of oil-limited seaplanes, or even a squadron of surface raiders, may fail if they miss their contact with the intended target. If a big convoy has the misfortune to get right into a nest of submarines it is pretty certain our shipping losses that week would suddenly rise. Conversely, if our cruisers should chance to mop up raiders effecting repairs or busy unloading oil-drums for the U-boats, or cause a seaplane to have his petrol tanks punctured, then there is as much gladness in welcoming the convoy on arrival in port as there used to be when the corn ships avoided pirates and dodged into Puteoli.

The shipping-loss barometer will rise or fall every week till the signing of armistice; only the uncertainties of war can create these variabilities. The weakest feature of an island is its seaborne commerce, and this is never in a more sensitive condition than when in convoy. Union assuredly is shipping strength, but this collective security can also be a serious weakness. What is wanted as the 'something extra' is the discipline with which a number of merchant ships are controlled, taken to sea, shepherded, made to alter formation and change course, or (at a crisis) scatter as signalled. We do not interpret the problem accurately if we think of a convoy merely as a collection of ships under way moving in the same direction.

Order must triumph over chaos: brain over a mass of tonnage. Individually there may be the bravest, toughest, smartest ship-handlers that ever mounted a steamer's bridge, but we want, too, that co-ordinated knowledge which gives warning that a certain region is a dangerous focal point, or that a German battleship is somewhere about the ocean likely to be met with in a certain latitude and longitude. It is thus a convoy of (say) 50 steamers must be capable of being moved as a single ship.

At first some of the more implacable master mariners were still disinclined to readapt themselves and somewhat resented becoming one of a well-drilled crowd, but when it became realized that only by obeying certain signals could shipping escape the approaching raider it was certain that this mental outlook would be different. To wander over the seas alone, lacking protection, was considered a poor manner of voyaging, but when a Commodore ruled the organization, defensive escort was added, and the 50 units moved as one. Convoyed, escorted craft meant that, in spite of delays, a very slight percentage of vessels ever failed to reach port, but that most of the well-laden steamers arrived with their essential goods.

It is not always possible for a convoy to be composed of ships possessing pretty much the same speed or tonnage, however much one may try. For instance, the surface raider will almost certainly direct her guns on the tall passenger vessel of conspicuous decks and high freeboard. Such a vessel makes such an attractive target at a great distance that she may be hit long before the escort is attacked.

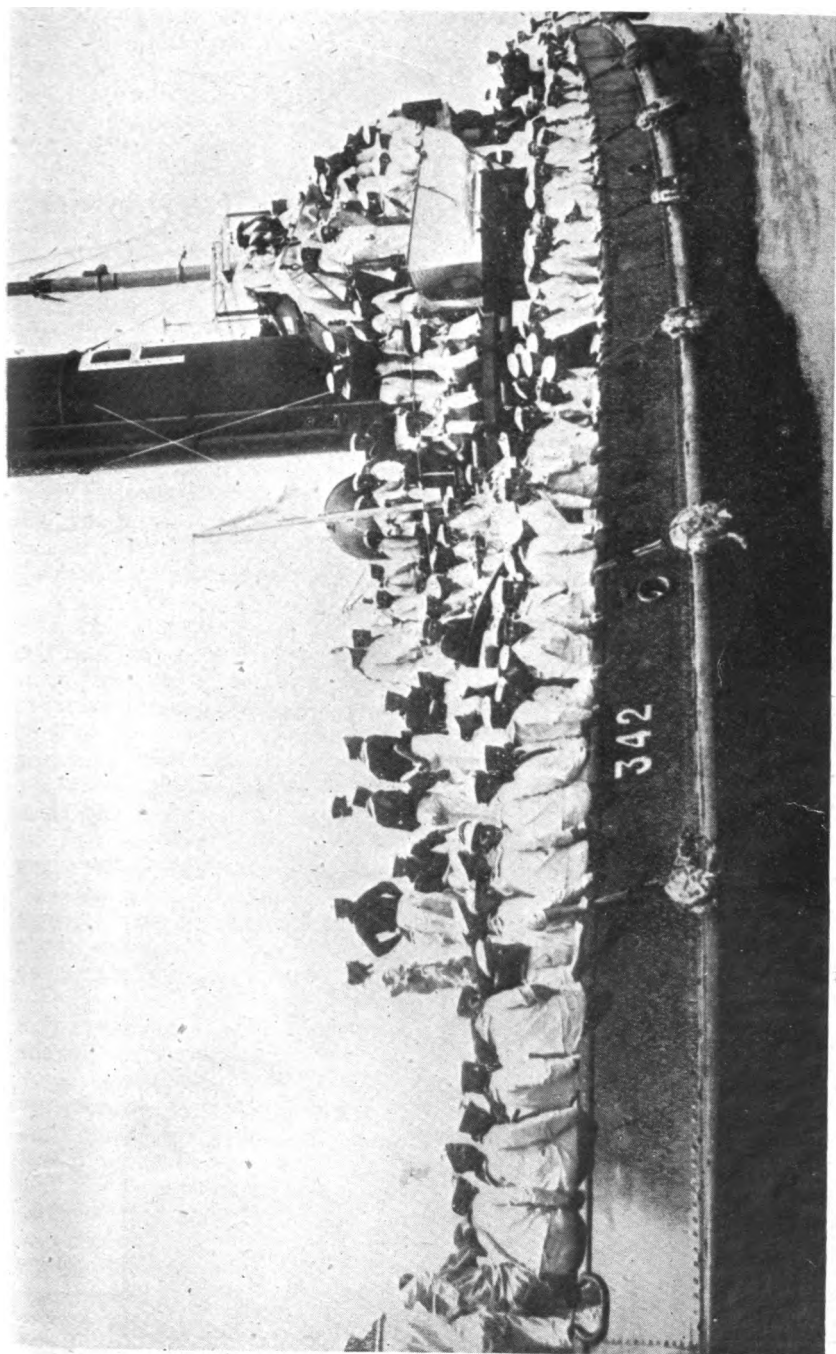
One convoy Commodore in the last war told me that he always made it a rule to alter course after dark either to starboard or port for roughly half the night, and then steer another course till dawn. These two halves would thus produce a mean course which would bring the convoy to a certain spot; from the latter ships would then steam for the noon position. The object is thus achieved of fooling U-boat or raider, however accurate may have been the previous daylight prophecy.

If the enemy had fixed the convoy's exact course at nightfall and then run ahead to be waiting at a certain spot for attack at daylight, he would be disappointed were the convoy really a long distance away. This Commodore told me that for almost every hour of the voyage he was kept busy; wireless messages, SOS reports coming from miles away, warnings from strange craft, flag signals, were all routine affairs. But it was the straggler, whose engines' break-down had caused him to fall out of column, that made the Commodore anxious.

A victim to a raider, Focke-Wulf, or submarine? Yes; and perhaps this trail today would reveal, a little further on, the convoy itself. So she became a danger to ships other than herself.

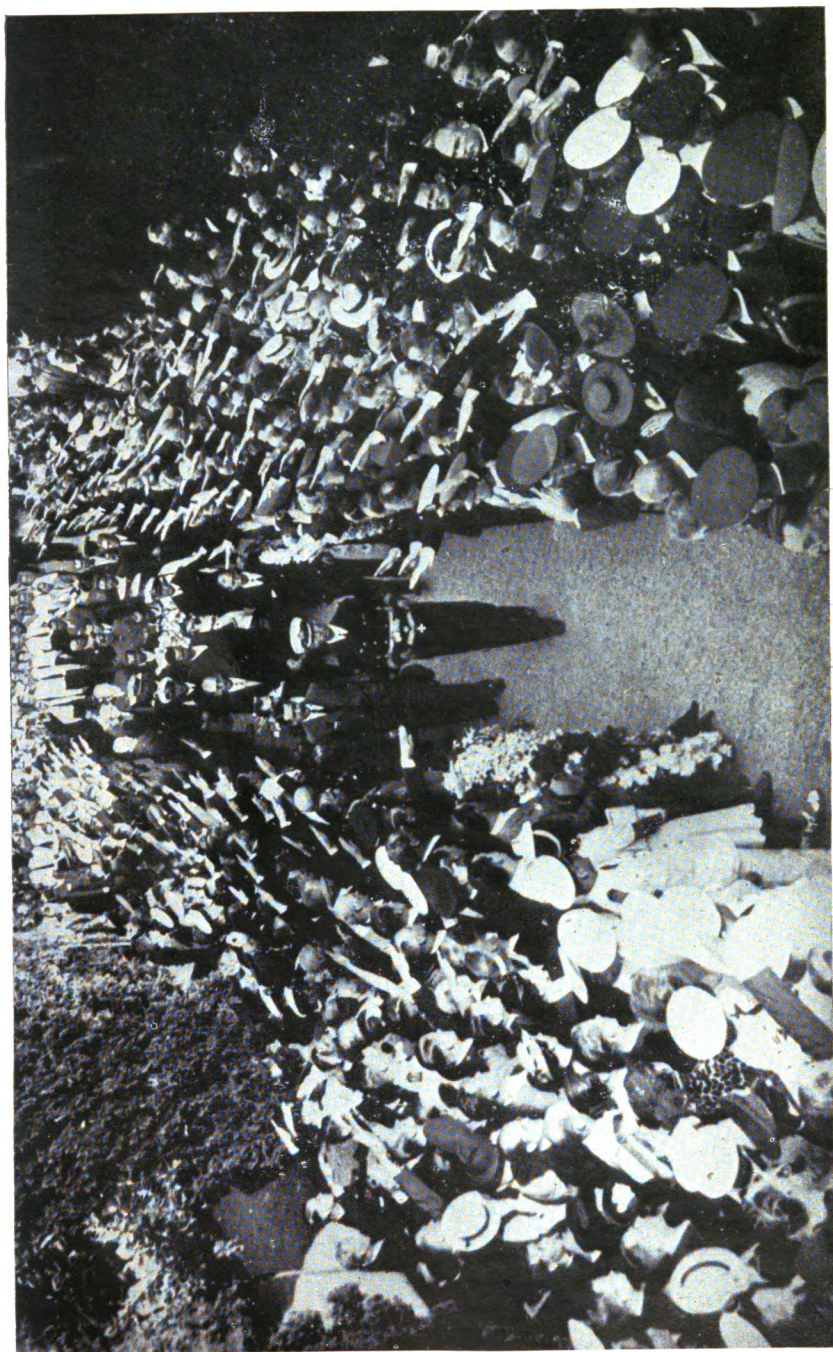
But a convoy is never so much ruled like a naval fleet as when the enemy looms up and formation for battle is organized. I recollect one Commodore leaving port in charge of 32 in the convoy. They steamed eight abreast with three escorts to port, four to starboard, two astern, and one ocean escort ahead. The Commodore flew his flag in one of the cargo vessels.

Suddenly on the lonely high seas appeared the enemy, but as our ships were armed defensively (i.e. with the gun astern in each case) there was a possibility of some guns injuring other ships at the rear. The Commodore re-formed his convoy for battle in line-abreast, thus there could be no risk of



HUNS FOR THE SHORE

Liberty men yearning for freedom of the South American shore after serving aboard the *Admiral Graf Spee*.



FUNERAL OF CAPTAIN LANGSDORF

After obeying orders to scuttle his ship, the *Admiral Graf Spee*, Captain Langsdorf's body was preceded in the streets by his decorations. The Nazi salute was accorded the coffin by members of the German colony.

mutual accident, but every gun in the convoy was able to concentrate against the German foe.

And that is the same sort of thing which obtains today where you have an instance of the 32 ships moving as one for the safety of all. These Commodores are generally real hard-bitten sailormen who have been to sea most of their lives. Some are retired admirals decorated in the last war who, in and out of Whitehall offices, almost pleaded to be sent afloat again. Their experience of fleet work, in having control of many ships under one flag, in manœuvring them across the world day and night in all sorts of weather, has a national value impossible to be assessed.

Courage, endurance, adaptability, coolness, are the four strands of that rope which binds such a sailor to his ship. Some, again, have been master mariners of huge liners for years, who have spent their lives in getting ships and their cargoes safe into port. I know of another who in the most literal sense has spent his life at sea: for immediately after retiring as an admiral he spent every summer and winter as his own skipper cruising in a yacht north, south, east and west—to the West Indies, and to almost every nook and creek of the Mediterranean.

Yet it is these mariners to whom we are eternally grateful for bringing us our supplies of food, breaking off their navigation to fight a naval battle; and when you see them ashore they have but one line of complaint.

"Convoy work? Well, I'll tell you in a sentence; plenty of fresh air but deadily undramatic."

Ocean-going convoys were quite simple affairs until the advent of enemy submarines, but then, because new methods of attack by U-boats had been thought out, it became necessary for the state of proficiency to be shaped on naval principles. It evolved from passive to active participation. Station-keeping, general manœuvres, signalling, were all so carefully practised that these retired admirals found they were commanding ships which moved like men-of-war: yet much preliminary work takes place before a convoy is fit to leave harbour.

First of all at the Control Office occurs the Convoy Conference which is attended by every shipmaster, the First Officer, Chief Engineer and Radio Operator. Every detail is explained so that nothing can be misinterpreted. Sailing orders are read, the ships of the convoy are ordered to leave harbour at a fixed time and order. Supposing there are 50 in this convoy and they pass a certain headland at three-minute intervals, it will mean two and a half hours before all ships have got clear of the harbour.

At this conference the Commodore will have given some idea of how he intends to work the convoy, the routine times of signalling, what each shipmaster may expect the Commodore to do under certain circumstances. Then the senior officer of the naval escort will similarly outline his idea of intentions, and thus, whether surface raider, packs of submarines, or air culprit should spring his surprise, these masters are pretty well prepared. After the conference concludes with certain questions and answers, the shipmasters return to their vessels fully ready.

When once the ships have cleared the harbour entrance, the convoy forms up as laid down in the diagram of which every master possesses a copy. State of the weather will affect departure, for fog or gale will certainly have some influence on the desire to form up in close order; yet thick weather is the lesser of these. The leaders in each column make their own signals by

siren and all manage to keep in position surprisingly well, so that when the fog clears there are usually no stragglers.

The lessons learned in the last war, and in many months of the present, have enabled these captains of vessels to realize that above their own daily practised seamanship there is really very little more to be learned. Common sense and the application of a few simple rules are all that matters. Even the risk of collision in fog does not cause so much anxiety as you might imagine. Lookouts are daily at their stations, but bad weather and poor visibility are both a protection to the convoy and a harassing experience to the U-boats. Suddenly a U-boat charging her batteries on the surface perceives a clearing in the mist out of which the guns of an escort quickly blaze at this target. There is no time but quickly to submerge and act on the defensive.

And attacks from a surface raider may be expected at any time, especially in a clear spell after patches of thick weather, or just before sunset. Perhaps without warning the senior officer of escort may inform the Commodore of what is impending. Then there will be movements ordered to the convoy, and certain changes in formation begun. Attacks on the convoy by U-boats have changed as the Germans have altered their tactics.

In the early days of this war the Nazis acted more in the tactical manner of the last hostilities: that is to say they were often content to operate near the coasts of the British Isles, varied by more distant excursions such as to waylay convoys off the Azores or the shores of Spain. Then, however, our air patrols and surface escorts became both numerous and stronger, so the U-boats had to modify their methods. Instead of submarines doing these coastal attacks, they sought out victims by greater enterprise.

The capture of France made matters simpler: whereas it used to take a whole week for a U-boat from Germany to reach the Fastnet and south of Ireland area, plus another week to go back home, the submarine could start direct from (say) Lorient or St. Nazaire on the Atlantic. Thus ocean routes at once meant submarine voyaging, the U-boats began to operate well out from the land, instead of wasting time off north Scotland or Channel mine-fields. Rather their custom was first to shadow, then to close in along the surface by night, but cautiously—that is to say with conning-tower just above water while the boat was ready at any moment to do a crash-dive.

Under suitable weather conditions this method contained much encouragement: by working with stealth and only limited visibility the submarines attained their greatest successes. Whilst it cannot be denied that the number of sinkings has thus approached a serious rate, yet conditions for convoys in the Atlantic have improved. I have known of the formation numbering as many as 120 valuable ships, but the Commodore starts out with confidence because nowadays station-keeping usually is first class, escorts are formidably armed, and we have so many aircraft.

After a voyage has progressed uneventfully there is always, not exactly panic—but some dismay—when perhaps in the middle of the night or early hours of the morning a torpedo bursts through the hull. What happens? At the best of times all lights have been put out, a certain amount of confusion made inevitable, engines stopped, heavy leaks gaining the upper hand and boats being lowered on to an ugly swell.

"Boat stations and stand by!" yells the master, and in the darkness not every boat will have got away from the steel side unhurt.

But the worst condition is when a tanker loaded with aviation spirit bursts into flames and the night is made hideously realistic like some volcano in eruption. The responsibility of a Commodore, already past the prime of seafaring, is such that he rarely leaves the bridge, yet on his judgment you and I are dependent and alike grateful that our needs continue to be supplied. Ten of these ocean voyages out and home are a good yearly average for most Commodores, yet how little do we realize that all this safe shepherding through stress and suspense is the price which has to be paid for seaborne goods?

We saw on an earlier page how the *Admiral Graf Spee* made herself a terror to our shipping during the initial weeks of this war: even with engines and gear in the best possible condition these mercantile vessels stood but slight chance at the mercy of a pocket-battleship.

But what sort of a hope was possessed by a steamer broken down in the bleak Atlantic, utterly lonely, yet buffeted by December gales? Would you call this a pleasant risk when German raiding, both by surface ship and submarine, was reaching its summit.

The S.S. *Dunelmia*, of 5207 tons gross, was bound across that Atlantic ocean from Barry Dock for Buenos Aires having as cargo 7232 tons of coal. Owned at West Hartlepool, ship with her freight was valued at £105,653, and an engine-room accident seemed to make her ripe for a raider's guns. How anxiously the horizon was scanned!

One day in December 1939 a ship came long. It was no Nazi, but another British merchantman. The Blue Star liner *Tacoma Star**, 7936 tons, London to the River Plate, carrying 2000 tons of cargo and a crew of 83. The *Dunelmia* began morsing:

... accident down below. Engine-room full of steam. Unable to proceed. Can you tow me to Horta, Fayal, in Azores? Shall not be able to make connection till tomorrow afternoon, by which time hope to have auxiliary steam.

The West Hartlepool master waited for answer as his steamship rolled in the Atlantic trough, hoping that this delay would not be prolonged.

Although the *Tacoma Star* with her cargo represented £200,000 and there was no denying that U-boats had been active in the neighbourhood, she morsed back:

"Will stand by you and do anything you wish."

The short afternoon with long night passed, and next day *Tacoma Star* in that heavy swell for hours tried to pass her wire, but it was no easy job. Both vessels rolled heavily, the risk of collision was very considerable, and the connecting manilla rope, unable to bear the terrific strain, parted with a snap.

The risk of getting this wire kinked into fouling *Tacoma Star*'s twin propellers, making her also disabled, was a real problem and it was with no little difficulty that they were cleared.

Night came, and further work on connecting the tow-rope had to be postponed till daylight returned, but meanwhile it was blowing a S.E. gale

*Not to be confused with the German *Tacoma* already mentioned.

and when the dawn broke it soon heralded that there was going to be far too much wind for the bigger ship to think of approaching. Such an attempt must end in disaster.

But on the morning of December 23 the gale began to moderate, *Dunelmia* made a signal after some repairs that she was now steaming slowly ahead. Good news—for a brief time—but then once more the engines stopped. The distance to Horta was 455 miles, but the chance of *Dunelmia* reaching there now looked anything except convincing. Time is money, the delay by weather and trouble to both these valuable ships already mounted up; yet still they were getting nowhere.

Tacoma Star must try again with the tow-line, but there still remained that risk of fouling the propellers, so it was decided that *Dunelmia's* line be taken; and this was done in the modern method by means of rocket line. At the end was attached a 5-inch wire, and that having been hauled in, it was shackled to a 6-inch. Seamanship of a wearying, bothersome, ordeal! For, handling 150 fathoms of this snake-like unsympathetic stuff at night-time, whilst the two ships rolled heavily, meant cumbrous toil.

The sort of occasion when human limbs have a way of becoming crushed.

The Skipper of *Dunelmia*, well-nigh exhausted by watching and tending, expressed his thoughts with accuracy when he sang across to Captain E. N. Rhodes of the *Tacoma Star*:

"We're rolling like hell," he hailed over the heavy sea.

The Blue Star liner allowed a scope of 1000 feet, yet *Dunelmia* was determined to become a wild creature, sheering madly about in the worsening weather, which caused progress to be slow if definite. Another midnight came round, still neither U-boat nor raider appeared but a fairly steady strain was maintained on the tow-line, whilst in the slow progress both vessels pitched their bows heavily, scooping up the sea which swept aft in a cascade.

Who would be a sailor? And in war-time?

Christmas Day in the North Atlantic! *Dunelmia* signalled to say that she had now been able to get her engines working. It was good enough news, though no appreciable effect had been observed so far: but that day terminated, and the next. By noon of December 27 both steamships arrived off the entrance to Horta. The once helpless West Hartlepool vessel had been saved from perils of the sea, perils of raiders, perils of submarines.

Subsequently, when this salvage case was brought before the Admiralty Court, the Judge, in remarking on the fine piece of seamanship displayed, awarded £500 to Captain Rhodes, £2200 between the 83 crew, and £8300 to the owners.

CHAPTER VI

CONVERTED MERCHANTMEN

It is curious how sentimentally an owner through the ages again and again repeats a ship's name, even though the years may alter to produce a type very different from the one originally built:

In the last war there was owned by the Royal Mail Line a steamer named *Alcantara* which used to trade with South America, but German raiders became so active off the east side of South America by November 1914 that for some time she had to remain inside the Brazilian port of Santos. She still continued on that run in February 1915, when there was such a rumour of the enemy's intention to capture her somewhere about the lonely volcanic convict island of Fernando Noronha (N.E. of the Brazilian shoulder), that the Admiralty sent H.M.S. *Sydney* to escort her through this danger zone.

But in the following April the Admiralty took over *Alcantara* and fitted her out as an armed merchant cruiser. Her special job was to patrol between Scotland and Norway, on the look-out for disguised German raiders breaking through our blockade.

It was on February 29, 1916, that she at last met a suspicious steamer which pretended to be coming from Rio de Janeiro bound as a Norwegian trader for Trondhejm. Actually she was the raider *Greif*, which had left Kiel 46 hours previously, intending to cruise the other side of Australia.

Deceit was penetrated, a fierce duel ensued, resulting in both *Greif* and *Alcantara* sinking.

After that war ended, the Royal Mail Line constructed another *Alcantara* in 1926 at Harland & Wolff's, but this time as a motor-ship. Being not quite a success, they rebuilt her in 1935, lengthened the hull, gave her geared turbines, and as a steamship of 22,209 tons she could do her 19 knots. When this second German war broke out, she was supplied with four guns and sent as an armed merchant cruiser to patrol the South America sea tracks under Captain J. G. P. Ingham, D.S.O., R.N.

A powerful big vessel for any raider to meet at sea! The day for pocket-battleships as commerce raiders having given place to disguised merchantmen, when two British steamers, *Davisian* and *King John*, were sunk on July 19, 1940, by a fast ship flying the Swedish flag, the use for the lengthened *Alcantara* seemed obvious.

But where could the enemy be found? The Atlantic Ocean is wide.

Well, those who remember the raiders of the last war will not have forgotten that lying out in the Atlantic less than a thousand miles N.E. of Rio de Janeiro is the desolate Island of Trinidad, the home of vicious land-crabs. In this anchorage the Germans had their rendezvous for supply-ships coaling the raiders, and within the first weeks of hostilities did the armed merchant cruiser *Carmania* surprise the Hamburg-America *Cap Trafalgar* whilst the latter was coaling.

Carmania's guns sent the German raider to the bottom.

Now what has been, may recur. On Sunday morning, July 28, 1940, *Alcantara's* turbines were humming along near this lonely isle and a smart look-out was being maintained, when a suspicious vessel was sighted. Probably about 10,000 tons. Dark hull, one funnel, two masts. Quite ordinary she seemed, yet Captain Ingham was not perfectly satisfied, so altered course to investigate. At first, no doubt, the *Alcantara* looked such a ripe fat plum that the other believed here was a veritable prize.

Finally, however, the stranger turned away so as not to be examined. Curious incident, that. Was there going to be another *Cap Trafalgar* affair? Or had the Nazi, also thinking of the *Carmania*, become nervous?

Alcantara increased speed, the chase became exciting as the stranger with the single funnel made off too quickly. It looked like being a first-rate duel

that would rival the two liners' tussle of 1914. About 2 p.m. *Alcantara*, having increased her number of knots, would presently be able to choose her own range and overhaul the enemy.

The stranger was a raider sure enough, and realized that *Alcantara* was not a simple lightly armed passenger ship. The last thing the Nazi wished was to fight a battle, yet possessed not speed enough to escape. The range had got down to 9200 yards, it would soon be less, so now the raider swung round to starboard, broke out the Nazi ensign, and opened fire, evidently resolved to gamble with fate.

But a gamble it undoubtedly became. *Alcantara* had just as many guns, more knots, and was securing fatal hits along the waterline. Certainly the raider received internal damage, for speed was reduced considerably and her gunnery became erratic.

But then something happened: the chances of war intervened.

The Germans fired a lucky shot which also went through into *Alcantara's* engine-room, killing two men, wounding seven; and although slightly injuring the ship yet it did reduce the rate of knots, and the enemy—seeing the gambler's opportunity—covered a retreat with smoke-screen, scurried out from range and broke off the duel. What promised to have become an interesting fight was put off by the Germans' escape.

Bitter disappointment mingled with anger which the ardent British sailors felt at being so cruelly robbed, yet under the circumstances there remained no alternative for the *Alcantara* but to make for Rio de Janeiro, where she arrived on August 1 and was permitted by the Brazilian Government to remain three days for repairs.

Now during the year German raiders, though occasionally lucky, were running tremendous risks. If the technique had passed from battleships to converted freighters and passenger ships (with their occasional supply-ships), it was for the Nazis a time of tremendous strain. Sooner or later our efficient patrol system must triumph.

Let me give a thrilling illustration of this.

Among the list of cargo vessels belonging to Sir R. Ropner & Co. Ltd., of West Hartlepool, some had been sunk in the first German war, others quite early on in this second war, but the crews had shown sterling gallantry.

On the morning of April 24, 1940, one of their steamships—the *Haxby*, built in 1929 of 5207 tons gross—happened to be voyaging in the North Atlantic and was near Bermuda bound for the Gulf of Mexico when one of these disguised, secret raiders came into sight. It was a surprising shock to meet such a vessel hereabouts, but this particular German was wont to cruise where least expected and rather an adept at modifying her appearance: her telescopic funnel, for instance, and other alterations, combined with change of name, used to fool even most experienced mariners.

But the Germans had learnt these tricks from us when in the previous hostilities we used to add fake transformations in our Q-ships: repainting hull, erecting dummy deck-house, concealing guns by imitation skylights. And so on.

Now *Haxby's* Master was Captain C. Arundell, of Sunderland, a typically blunt man of independent temperament and one accustomed to speak his own mind freely to friend or foe alike. Straight from his plain conviction he was wont to make utterance.

Your can imagine that such a rugged character would not easily fit in

with Nazi ideas of discipline. But there were more than a score of other Englishmen on the *Haxby*; including First Radio Officer G. W. Hackston, of South Shields—another of those strong characters who could not be broken by the swaggering Hun.

"Heave-to!" signalled the raider across the swell.

Captain Arundell would rather die. The Nazi began shelling, the first projectile killing the gunner behind the defensive weapon, and the Marconi operator began sending off S O S messages across the seas.

Other hits from the enemy smashed up both deck-house and lifeboats, and it was obvious that despite British bravery this uneven contest could only end in one way. For the Nazi was big and powerful: evidently "a decent-sized raider of more than 10,000 tons, armed with 5.9-inch guns".

But carrying also "a huge supply of mines"—as was later discovered.

This, however, was not the first occasion when raiders carried also a mine cargo. During the last war, the German ex-banana steamer *Möwe* laid 252 mines in eleven different lines off Scotland east of Cape Wrath, when outward bound to the South Atlantic, and thereon the battleship *King Edward VII* foundered. Further south, in the Bay of Biscay, she then laid some more mines off La Rochelle.

Similarly that other raider, *Wachtfels* alias *Wolf*, which sailed round the world just before the end of war, actually carried 500 mines painted grey, laying them off the Cape of Good Hope, off Colombo, and also off Aden.

Now when the raider realized that *Haxby's* wireless was bleating violently, shells rained more fiercely, till the British ship heeled over and began to sink rapidly whilst men were still being slaughtered. Most of the rest took to the boats, leaving behind about six, including Captain Arundell.

Then things went from bad to worse: the battered *Haxby* could not keep afloat much longer.

"Every man for himself," ordered the Master, and they began to fashion rafts by lashing together some pieces of wood. Half an hour later the German picked up these men out of the water and resumed her cruising. It was a boat lowered from the dirty-looking German that fetched on board the men clinging to the wreckage, though the 'dirt' may have been intentional disguise.

But when Captain Arundell got on board the ship that sank him, he made no attempt to disguise his opinions. And a German officer having insisted that nothing must be said against the Führer, the Sunderland skipper shut him up with a threat to hurl the Hun overboard.

It was a strange and monotonous sea life to which the Ropner crew now tried to accustom themselves. For two weary months, moving into different waters, these 23 rescued sailors with their Master tried in vain to settle down:

"You were receiving messages on your wireless," the Hun commanding officer accused.

"Well, what about it?" answered the operator.

"And now you shall decode them for me to read."

Hackston smiled.

"Not likely," he answered. And stuck firmly to his refusal.

Always the German must be on the move: any day he might suddenly be pounced upon and finished by one of our men-of-war. And this may have been the reason for his keeping well away from the usual tracks. Thus about the end of June 1940 he had steamed so far south as to be near New Zealand.

In those waters he boldly stopped a Norwegian merchantman named the *Tropic Sea*, a motor-ship owned by a Mr. Chr. Osberg, of Oslo. This was a 5781-tons vessel, in which the Norwegian captain had brought his wife.

But the Hun raider decided that the *Tropic Sea* should not be sunk. She was only 20 years old, and it would be convenient to transfer all the 24 British prisoners, then send them with a prize-crew to Germany. Besides, her cargo of wheat was worth preserving.

For some time the two vessels moved about in company, and the captives found that the food was bearable, although the chief diet consisted monotonously of soup. But so far the Germans had spent a singularly unprofitable voyage. All these weeks afloat, and only two captures!

At first the German seamen seemed positively to gloat over this *Tropic Sea* victory, but the raider captain had no delusions. He thought of the future more realistically.

"*Ach nein!*" he contradicted. "I fear the English will one day come."

And after a while, having no need for the prison ship further, he sent her away north towards Germany on her long trip. Again, in spite of a different vessel, the hours passed with monotonous regularity. From one hemisphere to another: extreme south, then across the equator and via Iceland towards Germany. And only an indefinite period of land imprisonment to look forward to at the end.

Meanwhile the *Haxby* men were becoming heartily bored with their meals of potatoes and black bread, thin coffee, and a very little rancid butter. Such edibles were beginning to tell on their health.

How much longer was this awful voyage to drag out?

Sailors have a way of sensing direction, change of climate, certain bits of geography. They had been 130 days on this voyage, and that promontory told them they were now in Spanish waters. Cape Finisterre. Scene of two British naval victories a couple of centuries ago! But today . . .

Perhaps a U-boat . . .

What was that black dot on the water?

Periscope?

Yes it is—periscope. Then the next thing would be a torpedo. Never mind about making a mistake: the Hun sometimes shoots his own people. Besides, the *Tropic Sea* had been built in Norway.

But something . . . Submarine rising to the surface . . . flag signal . . . she's hailing and speaking to us.

Coloured flags!

M . . . N. 'Stop immediately'.

"Why! She's a British submarine. White Ensign."

"And I can see her name now. *T-R-U-A-N-T*. That's who she is."

There never was a more dramatic meeting on the high seas. The young naval commanding officer, Lieut.-Commander H. A. V. Haggard, R.N., leaned out from his chariot-shaped conning-tower. Panic seized the Germans, who acted in haste. Explosive charges were got ready, the *Tropic Sea* was caught at the last—after all these days.

Before she could sink they all took to the boats—German, British, Norwegian—and meanwhile *Truant* motored up. There was the Norwegian captain. He was taken aboard this submarine. Yes, and his wife too. The 24 people from the *Haxby* also were given yet another change of accommodation: so at last they were again under the British flag. But any more



TO THE GRAVESIDE

German colonial sympathizers present their last respects to the body of *Admiral Graf Spee's* captain, who committed suicide.



GERMAN SAILORS

landed from the scuttled pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee* are seen engaged at Buenos Aires in their internment after defeat.

the *Truant* could not stow away, and the rest would have to remain where they happened to be. Fortunately, the sea was a flat calm, so there would be little risk.

Meanwhile Haggard reported the incident; R.A.F. flying boats were sent out, and thus the other Norwegians arrived in England. As to the *Truant*, she went south with her crowded passengers and reached Gibraltar, where the party landed. From 'the Rock' the *Haxby* crew made yet another voyage and went north to Scotland, where they landed safe and well on October 5.

Five months! And home again!

Had mariners ever spent such a voyage out and home?

When we remember that we started the present war possessing 2000 fewer ships than when we began the war of 1914, we were taking a great risk with our margin of safety. We might have known that we should suffer immense losses, for during the period of 1914-18 more than one-third of all British shipping was lost through German action. On the other hand, it is well recognized that in size and speed our ships have much increased. In fact the carrying capacity of our shipping in 1939 was almost equal to that of 1914. When Italy entered the war and disputed with us the passage of vessels along the Mediterranean, the fact that we had to send shipping via the Cape of Good Hope meant much longer voyaging and the loss for the time being of considerable tonnage.

The wonderful fact is that despite all the losses and dangers of the seas, there has been no decline in recruiting for our Merchant Navy. And that service has been building up during this war a wonderful tradition which will long be remembered. Take three occasions alone: in Norway, at Dunkirk, in Crete, the British Merchant Navy played a magnificent part whilst evacuating our armies. Their conduct and coolness in evacuating Crete have been superb; but many soldiers and airmen would like to give special thanks for the amazing manner with which they have brought their oil-tankers across the Atlantic through these months.

About noon on February 15, 1940 (being of course some weeks before Holland was invaded), the Dutch motor tanker *Den Haag* was on her way from New York to Rotterdam with petroleum products when she was torpedoed in the Atlantic without warning. The force of explosion was such that she was blown in halves but—wonderful to relate—her crew of 39 managed to get away in three boats. They had no clothes other than those they were at the time wearing, and they had mighty little provisions or water.

It was blowing freshly from the S.E. with a moderate sea: vile conditions for making an open boat voyage during January. Nothing was known of the fate which happened to a couple of boats containing 26 men, but on February 19 at 3 p.m. the British motor ship *Glenorchy*, homeward bound from the Far East, sighted a boat some 80 miles from the Spanish coast, in a rough sea with a S.W. wind, after passing through an extensive patch of oil on the surface. The *Glenorchy* could see no signs of life in her: nothing except what resembled a sail or tarpaulin laid alongside the thwarts. Captain Christie of the 9000-tons *Glenorchy* looked again through his binoculars but still was not satisfied.

Funny picture, that! Difficult to say exactly what had happened . . . unless . . . The Captain sounded his whistle and looked again.

Suddenly that boat came to life with heads and the waving of arms. The occupants of her consisted of the Master, Chief Engineer and 11 men of the *Den Haag*. Four days ago they had left their wreck and already had reached dire straits. Their mast and sail had been blown away, the rudder smashed; besides all this they were in the last stages of hunger and exhaustion. In fact the reason that at first the British skipper could see no one was because they had given up all hope and had laid themselves down to die.

It was a slow business by the time these starving Dutchmen were alongside the *Glenorchy* and only one of *Den Haag's* men was able to climb the pilot's ladder. The others had to be helped out on to the deck.

Now on February 14, 1940, the very day before *Den Haag* was torpedoed, the S.S. *Sultan Star* (12,306 tons) was also torpedoed by a U-boat. It happened so quickly and without any warning—not even a suggestion that the enemy was about—that Captain Bevan on his bridge received the first intimation when the torpedo exploded.

The Master paced out to the wing of his bridge and looked along his vessel. She was shivering still from the shock of explosion. Almost immediately he saw that she was beginning to settle in the water, so he went to the engine telegraphs and rang down 'Finished with engines', which was the prearranged signal for those below in either engine-room or stokehold to go to their boat stations. In perfect discipline these people came up on deck: all, that is, except one man who had been killed by the explosion. Meanwhile the radio operator, Mr. P. Winsor, was tapping out the S O S. Rapidly but calmly the crew had gathered at their boat stations, where the Chief Officer mustered the men and then reported 'Ready' to the Master.

It was a decisive moment when Captain Bevan realized that his fine ship was sinking so rapidly by the stern that he at once ordered her to be abandoned; for no ship-master gives that instruction except when absolutely convinced that the time has now come. He was careful to see that all boats got well clear of the ship, excepting one which was to stand by to pick up the wireless operator and himself.

The *Sultan Star* began sinking more quickly as the boats were rapidly lowered and pulled clear. But there ensued a tussle between inevitability and will. For although the seas already engulfed the after-end of the boat-deck, the operator wanted to remain at his instruments till the last second, and the Master stood by him well conscious that if they were to save their lives they must go at once. Captain Bevan was becoming annoyed. Winsor, a big, heavy man, refused to be torn from his duty and literally fought his Captain off.

"I don't really know that the signal's through," explained the wireless officer, "and I'm going to stay till I'm certain."

Captain Bevan could do no more. The ship was disappearing so fast that it seemed suicide to stay another instant, so at length he dived over the side and struck out towards the boat waiting for him. As he was hauled out of the sea, he looked back for Winsor; the ship was almost standing on her stern, bows in the air and the waves actually pouring down the funnel. At this critical moment the heavy Winsor was seen to leave his wireless office and make a dash for the ship's side. The operator had left escape pretty late, and was now in the act of sliding down the rope . . . when the ship sank.

The *Sultan Star* left him. He did not leave the *Sultan Star*. But he

made a grab for some wreckage. Now she carried a deck cargo of 200 barrels. These had broken loose, and were crashing wildly about amidst sheer confusion and a mixture of currents caused by structural opposition here and there opposed to the force of the inpouring sea. In fact it was as if these barrels were being hurled about violently by some fierce stream. To have taken the boat into that maelstrom would have meant the destruction of her ribs and planking. Men could not long have been alive in such a dangerous turmoil. And, moreover, the boiler might be expected any minute to burst and send up lots of wreckage shooting to the surface.

Captain Bevan was in a dilemma. He wanted to save his operator, yet it was no good risking the other lives so desperately, so the only thing was to wait at the edge of this maelstrom for the immediate present. The period when this huge mass of 12,306 tons ceased disappearing was the time when these barrels would cease crashing madly about. So he bade his men hover a while.

To wait in that predicament on the very edge of the peril was bad enough, but prudence dictated. Captain Bevan even heard Winsor utter a groan of pain as the heavy man was caught and crushed between two barrels. It was a sickening sound, and all who glanced that way experienced the horror of it all. That surely was the end of the operator who had stayed too long? But Winsor was not gone yet. He still held on to floating wreckage, and never let go.

Captain Bevan waited, he kept the boat just clear of the danger area . . . still bided his time. Then, when the *Sultan Star* had been gone 20 minutes, it became possible to search for Winsor. The maelstrom became smooth enough to find him among the barrels and he was dragged into the boat unconscious, less alive than dead, but Captain Bevan hoped that he might live. The first thing was to force brandy down Winsor's throat, but meanwhile the S O S message which had been sent off so meticulously had got through. A fine thing for the operator to have risked his life in that broadcast, and it had splendid results.

For three destroyers came as answer—not merely in order to rescue men from the boats: another reason was they hoped to settle with the Nazis. Captain Bevan saw that Winsor was placed aboard one destroyer and in a surgeon's hands; otherwise it seemed hardly possible that the wireless officer could have lived. By the next morning, however, the latter had made such a marvellous recovery that he soon became well.

And the story concluded with other pleasant news.

Although three large British vessels had been torpedoed—for, besides the *Sultan Star*, there went down the *Gretafeld* (10,191 tons) and the *Triumph* (8501 tons)—yet there had been three U-boats who co-operated. And as to the submarine which sank *Sultan Star*, that U-boat survived her victim only half an hour, when she was sunk also for the last time. For one of the destroyers blew up the submarine, although the enemy was about to torpedo a Norwegian vessel, whose crew had already taken to their boats. But when the Norwegians saw the enemy sunk, the former returned on board their ship and brought her safely to port. Thus, in delaying the transmission of his S O S, Winsor had summoned not merely succour but revenge also.

CHAPTER VII

THE CONVOY IN PERIL

It was the fifth of November 1940, and the locality about a thousand miles to the eastward of Newfoundland. It may have been intentional, or otherwise, but 'Bonfire Night' had been selected by a Nazi surface raider to do her worst against a valuable convoy of 38 ships.

More accurately the commercial vessels numbered 37, for one other (of 2374 tons) had become a straggler and during this detachment was located three days later by an aircraft, when she was bombed. Now as Commodore of the convoy was Rear-Admiral Maltby, who before retirement had served both in H.M.S. *Lion* and the Royal Yacht *Victoria & Albert*. Today he was in the 4952-tons S.S. *Cornish City*, whilst Captain E. S. F. Fegen, R.N., commanding the armed merchant steamer *Jervis Bay*, was responsible for the escort.

Captain Fegen was typical of so many officers, whose family at different times has given her best sons to the Royal Navy and can always be relied upon to uphold the honour of the White Ensign till their last breath. Twice he had been awarded the silver medal for gallantry in saving life at sea. One of his brothers had left the service after the last war and settled in the East, whilst another retired so recently as 1939. His father was a Rear-Admiral—Frederick Fogarty Fegen—and his grandfather, Captain Fegen, R.N., left the sea service after so lengthy a career that, taken together, all these five individuals will be reckoned as summing up British seamanhood at its best.

By such officers as these has our wonderful naval tradition been kept alive from generation to generation and handed on with fresh spirit. Readiness to do the ideal thing immediately; irrespective of personal danger; fidelity to duty regardless of survival; that had been the motive exhibited by Captain E. S. F. Fegen, and we are only too grateful that our country has continued through the ages to produce such gentlemen of the sea.

The evening of this November 5 was at first fine, clear, calm, with a light S.E. breeze and extreme visibility—one of those autumn evenings which are often followed by gales of wind and heavy Atlantic seas.

About 5.30 p.m. the convoy was steaming on an easterly course when lookouts sighted the outline of a warship on the port beam about eight miles to the north. Further investigation confirmed the suspicion of her being another of those German pocket-battleships. Never had there been more than three of them: one had been sunk off South America nearly twelve months ago; the present silhouette forward differed slightly from the *Admiral Scheer*, so the stranger must be the *Deutschland*, which evidently specialized in this extreme North Atlantic and had sunk the *Rawalpindi* on November 23, 1939.

Like a jungle animal on the prowl, the enemy considered these 37 ships with an aggregate of 200,000 tons as a wonderful gift ready to be pounced upon. No time for the convoy to hesitate, not a minute to be wasted, for at full speed of 26 knots the German could even be at close range in a quarter of an hour.

Admiral Maltby at once signalled all his vessels should turn away to starboard. This, of course, demanded the passing of some minutes. In

that convoy conspicuously stood out the profile of the 17,000-tons New Zealand liner *Rangitiki*. This fine passenger ship was completed in 1929 as a very special type for carrying both mail and cargo, and driven by diesel engines with twin screws. Singularly graceful, she had been designed for reaching New Zealand via the Panama Canal, and was the first oil-fuel vessel to be placed on this passenger-mail service. Not a 'flyer'—reliable for about 15 knots—this noble vessel was commanded by Captain Henry Barnett.

When the raider suddenly opened fire at 15,000 yards it was obvious that the target was the *Rangitiki*, biggest ship of that convoy, and still further noticeable with her twin funnels. Speed of convoy about nine knots, but as passengers in that palatial lounge sighted the battleship and felt the engine revolutions quicken in their own vessel whilst she obeyed Admiral Maltby's order for all ships to scatter, the immediate future began to look pretty serious.

Shells could be heard screaming overhead, and as the raider fired his first salvo into the middle of the convoy it seemed remarkable that not one ship was hit. To make a screen, smoke-floats were dropped and the light breeze which now began to freshen determinedly helped like a thick curtain to interpose between the enemy's guns and the target. The value of many months' ship-handling in convoy under an experienced senior officer could hardly have been better shown, and the general effect of Admiral Maltby's instructions was to prevent the raider from concentrating on particular units, while ship-masters gradually widened their distance from the German. It was a sufficient answer to the old croakers, who never believed in modern convoys, that these vessels very quickly had turned at right angles from their easterly course and so well had dispersed that not one collision occurred. One might indeed well have believed that out of this fleet of 37 some might crash their bows into hulls, especially as the light was vanishing.

Rangitiki was as much threatened with danger as could have been expected of a tall passenger ship. If the first salvo had fallen off the star-board quarter, it went 400 yards short. The second straddled her amidships, and the third straddled her again, but just forward of the bridge. One might have deemed this liner's chance of survival beyond all hope, for the bridge became smothered with spray, and shell fragments even struck the ship forward. Yet for the present the damage was slight.

The battleship was now bringing his 5.9-inch to bear at shorter range, but as the enemy was to leeward and the smoke-screen drifting down-wind from the south-eastward, *Rangitiki* succeeded in extricating herself from a particularly hot corner. Then with a reserve of another six knots to be gradually attained, and only a quarter-moon to show her wake, this much-tried mail ship survived.

But the hero of the fight belonged to the convoy escort *Jervis Bay*, and her commanding officer, Captain Fegen, true to his duty, drew out from the convoy to meet the advancing raider. It availed little that some of the ships, and the *Jervis Bay* herself, did fire at the raider from their defensive guns; yet, being so easily out-ranged, how little could be expected of such small calibres!

Just as might have been foreseen, he stopped to remember neither that his ship was unarmoured nor that offensively she stood little more than a few minutes' chance against a battleship. Yet, as a sailor would express it,

he went 'bald-headed' for the foe, and by thus attracting most of the Nazis' shells enabled the convoy some easier moments in their escape. He entered into this murderous hail of steel with that bravery which does not waiting reckon the cost, and the *Deutschland* soon transformed her into a blazing mass of smoke and flames, a desolation of scorched wreckage; then worked round the convoy for more victims.

Engineers, firemen, deck-hands, volunteers, all toiled fiercely to get a little more speed out of the convoy's engines. The supreme maximum effort was being put forward in every ship, for there seemed still hope in the approaching darkness of the night. One vessel, normally good for nine knots, worked up to 12½, and maintained it till some time after. In another steamer the Captain descended to the boiler-room for the purpose of encouraging his men, but when he found them shovelling at the furnaces so fast, he decided not to interfere with such bursts of toil. Their untiring energy could not be much longer expended, and back he climbed to the bridge.

The enemy had now turned to a parallel course, as every engagement sooner or later veers, and in spite of *Jervis Bay* heading direct for her most certain doom, she continued steering for the enemy. Some of the salvoes dropped short, but it was the second which really decided the grand fate; all the others were but supplementary. She had been hit amidships, by a shell crashing through on the port side, putting the engines out of action. She thus stopped and lost way. From that moment it was just a matter of turning an immobile hull into jagged steel. The third salvo struck just before the bridge, and the fourth set her alight.

Robbed of all power, holed below water-line, steering-gear put out of action, her White Ensign was shot away until a sailor was sent aloft with a new one which was nailed to the mast in accord with that practise which so often has distinguished our naval duels. Then Captain Fegen, who was last seen on his bridge, having ended his gallant career as a seafarer, went down into the Atlantic whilst the *Jervis Bay* made her final plunge. Posthumously he was awarded the Victoria Cross, and when Captain Barnett remarked that "If any man ever deserved it, Captain Fegen did," this opinion was found to be shared by all the Masters.

As one considers that originally the convoy numbered 38, of which one had become a straggler and was sent to the bottom three days later by an aircraft's bomb, it seems quite remarkable that of the 37 only four of them (totalling 25,453 tons) were sunk. Among the *Rangitiki's* passengers were seven women, who displayed a wonderfully calm demeanour, even when the spray and fragments of shell flopped on to the decks. That night, still wearing lifebelts in the saloon, passengers remembered what they had been through only half a mile from the *Jervis Bay* when shelling began. But under the cloak of night how lonely yet safe seemed the Atlantic! How distant the *Deutschland*!

So the passengers dined off roast chicken and strawberry sundaes, as if nothing had happened only an hour or two earlier. As for the anxious Captain and his officers, the hard-working engineers and crew snatched a meal as best they could.

Now among the *Deutschland's* victims this day was also the motor tanker *San Demetrio* of 8073 tons which had left Halifax on October 28 in convoy. She did the little that she could in replying with her small gun to the raider, but became severely on fire from German shells. As we have seen on another

page, and so many incidents from 1939 onwards emphasized, a raider's shell into a tanker usually had but one result: the latter got on fire, the crew then abandoned her, and took to the boats.

As usually happens with a S.E. wind, it veered to the S.W., developed into a gale with heavy sea and icy rain. Sixteen of these men having survived the Nazi terror had in the North Atlantic no better home than is provided by an open boat. What a night for brave sailors bringing us their risky cargo across the ocean! Wind, waves, chilly rain and blazing oil: could any situation seem less hopeful?

The *San Demetrio* was owned by the Eagle Oil Company, and the *Deutschland* had made a pretty mess of her; her bridge, steering-gear, wireless, and charts being all destroyed. But having again sighted their vessel at dawn still afloat and still burning, these 16 homeless mariners, consisting of the Second Officer and fifteen of the crew, considered that they might just as well go back on board their tanker as freeze to death in the open boat. So for 11 hours they fought the conflagration in this blazing vessel, while the gale outside competed with its fury.

It seemed just a question as to which force of nature would win, when suddenly a heavy sea leapt on board and went breaking like a giant cascade along the deck, but it was more than a match for the fire and miraculously Atlantic waves saved *San Demetrio* from blowing up like a volcano. There were on board 11,200 tons of gasoline!

Having restored this wreck to some sort of order, the next thing was to find that the engines, despite water and fire and everything else, would still continue to revolve, but the steering could only be done from the poop by using four spokes of the wheel. Still, that was a very great deal. We saw there were no longer any charts, but the mariners got under way from a position estimated to have been Lat. 52°45' N. Long. 32°13' W., and headed about N.E., the officer steering by the Pole Star at night and by the sun in daytime. As a navigational feat it was an ingenious and plucky effort: as an exhibition of seamanship in nursing vessel and engines for eight days across the Atlantic, the whole enterprise showed resource and devotion which will be remembered long after this war.

But those who played such distinguished parts in this great drama had till the end declined to give in. Some men might have been unnerved on the first night whilst it blew a full gale and they had lain to a sea anchor. The scene was made hideous then as they watched *Jervis Bay* and three other vessels burning brilliantly, but the fact that *San Demetrio* encountered on the way home neither submarine, nor another raider, was more than fortunate. She could not speak any other vessels, since all her signalling flags had been burnt, and the only bit of bunting to survive was her Red Ensign which had been flying in the wind all the time.

When she made her landfall off the west of Ireland on November 13 in Black Sod Bay and worked her way to the Clyde, their main diet had been restricted to bread, onions, and potatoes; but because her cargo had been highly inflammable, they were too scared to light a galley fire, so they cooked by heat derived from the exhaust in the engine-room.

It is delightful to chronicle that though the *San Demetrio* had started her voyage with 11,200 tons of oil the brave crew brought her home with 11,000 tons. Especially resourceful was an apprentice, John Lewis Jones, and as he lay that first night in the ship's boat which danced about, but was

kept head to wind by the sea-anchor, his mind was still active for future decisions, still undaunted by what had passed before his eyes. During those eight days towards Scotland, he kept alternate watches and even volunteered to go down with the Chief Engineer to the pump-room and open the valves, although it was full of petrol gas. A young mariner beginning his life like that has before him a wonderful future.

For safely bringing the *San Demetrio* into port with most of her valuable cargo, the 16 gallants were presently awarded £14,700, and of this amount Jones received as his share the sum of £1200. Fortunately, Captain G. Waite and some others of the crew had been picked up from the burning ship and taken to Newfoundland.

So long as the present generation lives, this true story of seamen will be told and retold. One of *San Demetrio's* officers relates how, when *Jervis Bay* was signalling the convoy to scatter, that ship was "standing up to the enemy like a hen standing up to a great tom-cat while her brood of chickens made off". The flagship selected by Admiral Maltby, *Cornish City*, was another motor vessel of 4952 tons, owned by the Reardon Smith Line of Cardiff, and the *Jervis Bay* by the Aberdeen and Commonwealth Line.

One thinks of Fegen and *Jervis Bay* with an admiration that suggests reverence, for as we present those little human touches of his suffering we can build up for our imaginations that utter self-sacrifice nobly borne. Quite early his arm had been shattered, but this did not prevent him from standing on the bridge amidst ships, still Captain to the last, still defying the battleship.

Then the after portion of this bridge was shot away, but in great pain he staggered to the after bridge where he again tried to control matters, but this, too, was shot away. Undaunted, he then returned to the main bridge. Whether this superhuman effort was the last which his body could offer for his ship and country; whether physical agony and the weakening loss of blood made him collapse into the flames, we can but guess. He was never seen again.

The *Jervis Bay* quite certainly was beyond all help, and sinking by the stern: only a few minutes could now intervene before the full drama ended. As the men were ordered to abandon ship the Nazis, showing no mercy, deliberately raked the lifeboats while sailors were falling dead. Yet the discipline and coolness under a bitter fire were exemplary. Two-thirds of the survivors had come from the Mercantile Marine; this was their first introduction to naval fighting, and they contended as if hardened veterans.

All but one lifeboat was consumed by fire, so the 65 survivors had to be saved by emergency rafts: fortunately the *Deutschland* was too hurried for more. Changing the target, she concentrated on another of the convoy. This enabled the 65 to be picked up by a Swedish vessel of the convoy.

This Captain, Sven Olander, a Swedish neutral, was lost in admiration for such flawless British bravery. When the signal to scatter had been taken in he had obeyed, but five hours later Captain Olander had returned to the scene, and to come back like that into the heart of wild fury searching for any survivors seemed a fine brotherly affection towards British seamen.

Well, the Swede had remembered.

"They did so well for us," he remarked of these fighting seamen, "that I simply had to come back. I couldn't—I just couldn't leave them to drown."

So in a few days they were landed at a Canadian port.

No impartial critic would have blamed *San Demetrio's* people for having

forsaken their ship after the first salvo straddled her and the third created severe damage. The Nazi battleship had so exactly got the range, that it was perilous to remain aboard with all that loose petrol, and they went off, as ordered by the Master, in three boats. Even as they were being jerked about in these open craft, it was an anxious time. The flames seemed to be getting worse, shells were frequently coming over, and flames from three other ships were blazing; a sickening sight.

When day succeeded night and heavy seas made it risky to take their boats near the burning hull—oil spurting through the decks, 16 ft. of water in the forehold, and the store-rooms gutted—that was really the supreme moment of the tanker's tragedy. Had the one boat-load consisted of Frenchmen, frankly I do not believe they would have risen to an occasion which at that time looked so hopeless.

It took them six hours of discouraging toil to get the hoses going with sufficient pressure to isolate conflagration from petrol, to plug the holes, and make the *San Demetrio* less like a wreck. The voyage at nine knots certainly ended in safety, but never had she seemed so awkward; for here at last was the shelter of Black Sod Bay and the seas were now smooth, but the anchors and cables of an 8000-ton ship cannot be man-handled. And this was awkward, because the steam-pipes to the winches had been smashed.

But, fortunately, a destroyer came along and from that stage accompanied her to port.

Thus the *San Demetrio*—worth £300,000 with her cargo—though only two years old at the time, had been snatched from disaster; and when a salvage claim was brought by officers and crew, the owners even guaranteed the costs. Mr. A. G. Hawkins, the Second Officer, in charge of the ship and salving, was aged only 26, and had the remarkable experience of being congratulated by Mr. Justice Langton, the Bar, and Elder Brethren of Trinity House.

CHAPTER VIII

BRITISH CRUISERS AND GERMAN RAIDERS

BOTH in the present war and the last nothing so terrified a lone German man-of-war as the suspected presence of a vessel flying the White Ensign: for to meet one of our 'County'—*Cornwall*, *Devonshire*, *Dorsetshire*—class is to be up against naval might at its highest efficiency; but, also, the latter are ships of 10,000 tons, with a remarkable speed of 32 knots, well protected with armour. And, let it be remembered, eight 8-inch guns besides anti-aircraft weapons.

In the early part of 1941 the enemy had sent to the Indian Ocean the disguised Hansa liner *Pinguin*—about 10,000 tons, armed with six 5.9-inch guns, torpedo tubes, plus a large number of mines for laying ambush traps along the sea tracks—and she certainly had a measure of success.

For even during war-time, as the *Emden* appreciated early in the First German hostilities, a raider is bound to fall upon valuable shipping along that

ocean. The *Penguin* had already taken into captivity from a sunken ship some 40 or 50 British seamen.

Then suddenly H.M.S. *Cornwall* rushed into sight, and those 8-inch shells created a devastating effect with promptitude. It is true the German with her weapons made some superficial damage, but nothing comparable to the wreckage which the other caused. Moreover, when one projectile detonated those mines, the last chapter of the raider's existence was spelled out.

Unfortunately, yet inevitably, some of the British sailor captives thus lost their lives, but we were able to give 27 others their living freedom and take prisoners some 53 Germans who would do no more roving.

A neat, clean ending to a marauder? Perhaps the public hardly realizes what it means to search an ocean some thousands of miles wide, yet to surprise the enemy at the exact moment. Germany will try to use raiding against our commerce till the close of war: these surface ships will indeed try their worst till the very end.

Yes; but in the year 1941 alone we accounted for no less than 22 converted mercantile raiders, which is almost two every month. And the enemy does not easily find hand-picked crews for such a dangerous nerve-trying job.

Nowadays the Atlantic raider must also act as supply-ship to the submarine. In order that the U-boat may do her job for weeks on end before returning across the seas to port, the raider brings out barrels of diesel oil, and even fresh submarine crews. A rendezvous is arranged off some reef or island, the raider lowers a boat, exchanges are made in barrels or personnel. And away the visiting vessel then seeks out cargo victims.

This represents actually the story of H.M.S. *Devonshire*, Captain R. D. Oliver, D.S.C., R.N., then combing the South Atlantic with that thoroughness which speed helps to obtain. It was November 21, 1941, her engines were driving the slim-limned cruiser furiously through the early dawn. Something happening over there! Something that needed investigation!

Devonshire had worked up to more than 32 knots, but ahead she had also sent her aircraft, for a merchant vessel of sorts was lying apparently stopped. More detailed examination was very necessary, and in that early tropical air much might be revealed.

Not for nothing does a mercantile ship stop her engines on the high seas; but now was revealed also an open boat, and on further looking into the matter there could be seen heavy oil drums. What inference? That the U-boat must be near at hand, who would receive these welcome gallons after being rowed across the swell.

But the general look of this mysterious vessel suggested that of an armed German raider: for the *Altmark*, with tanker-like characteristics, had set a precedent which the enemy largely followed.

Devonshire caught the culprit in the very act. Night had certainly been used to cover transactions not yet quite finished. The former hoisted a string of signals in the broadening light, and if a raider is instantly to make a convincing reply, then her Captain on the bridge must not be of the typically dull, sullen type, but quick-witted.

In the last war, for example, when H.M.S. *Dundee* had stopped the notorious German raider *Leopard* (alias *Rena*), the patrol vessel inquired: "What ship is that?" but was given no answer. A few minutes later came "What is your cargo?" "General," was the reply. "Where are you from?" "Mobile"—a port on the Gulf of Mexico—went the lie invented; but after

the British Captain of *Dundee* further demanded "When did you leave?" the German could make no sort of answer. She was quite beaten in this repartee.

She could do only one thing: cease all pretence and open fire with her secret torpedo-tubes. Two projectiles came from the German, but they missed *Dundee* by 20 and 50 feet respectively. Just after 4.35 that afternoon the *Leopard* was sunk.

Well, now, Captain Oliver did precisely the right thing when even one minute of delay would have been fatal. The enemy's replies to *Devonshire's* signals were so perfectly unsatisfactory, that the British cruiser dared not waste precious seconds but wisely opened fire. The quicker brain had rightly judged the situation.

For the German now revealed her equivocal nature, tried to get away out of it behind a smoke-screen; yet still it was too late. So accurate and deadly were British gunners firing 8-inch shells that within 10 minutes the raider became a fierce conflagration, the German crew hastily began lowering boats, and then her magazine blew up with a sickening crash. Thus the stealthy stalker of steamers was sent to her doom within about a quarter of an hour from start to finish.

And the *Devonshire* suffered not so much as a scratch to her hull, or a casualty among her crew. Had the British Commanding Officer been less knowledgeable, he might have stopped engines just long enough to pick up boats and capture those German prisoners. But it would have been long enough also for the U-boat to have chosen her position and aimed a torpedo. This Captain Oliver had suspected, and this the submarine (as was confirmed) contemplated doing.

But yet again the more alert mind won, it was not possible under the circumstances to ease machinery but rather to continue at over 32½ knots; and that U-boat must have been left to become crowded beyond all endurance—whilst dangerously short of oil fuel.

Before the year 1941 had quite ended another of these brilliant cruiser episodes occurred in the South Atlantic. First of all we must cast our memory back to the summer of 1919 when the Armistice passed and we were engaged in a brief campaign against Northern Russia. In June of that year a 40-foot coastal motor-boat, weighing not more than 4½ tons, made a desperate night incursion into the harbour of Kronstadt and with amazing bravery torpedoed the cruiser *Oleg* (6650 tons).

In charge of this frail craft went a young British naval officer, Lieut. A. W. S. Agar, R.N., for whose successful courage the Victoria Cross was awarded. That August another similar expedition came to be undertaken by several of those craft, and again the same young officer played his plucky part.

Twenty years passed, this junior lieutenant had risen through one success to another and Captain A. W. S. Agar, V.C., D.S.O., R.N., had become a distinguished cruiser captain. As Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Dorsetshire*, he was of such proved ability that with all his experience and personal initiative he must be not less a success when commanding a craft of 9900 tons as when Captain of the 4½-tonner.

The South Atlantic in 1941 was still the lair of German marauders and it had become even more desirable that these raiders should be destroyed, seeing that they were now supply-ships to the U-boats which, after their

egress from St. Nazaire, Lorient, and even Dakar, carried on westward right till the approaches of the United States.

One day the *Dorsetshire* on passage across this ocean found herself confronted with a similar problem to that which had been the *Devonshire's*. For Captain Agar had sent ahead his aircraft, who wirelessly back that a converted German merchantman of about 10,000 tons was lying stopped with not one, but five, boats alongside.

Quite obvious what had begun to happen!

The *Dorsetshire* came on at pace, but the raider had been rudely interrupted in her job of work, and immediately was fear-stricken. The five boats were cast off in a hurry, and the oil drums, plus stores of provisions, showed what were being ferried to the nearby submarine.

From the aircraft's description it was pretty clear that here must have been one of the more-or-less standardized German raiders of the oil-tank type, armed with several torpedo-tubes, 5.9-inch guns, but possessing half the *Dorsetshire's* speed.

The latter had, therefore, no difficulty in closing the distance, bringing those smashing guns to bear, and sending the target to the sea bottom. As before, there were no casualties or damage suffered by cruiser or aircraft, but again for the suspected presence of U-boats no effort was thrown away in picking up survivors.

Such incidents as these showed that in due time, when our overworked Navy were given bare opportunity, the surface-raiders could find their opportunities very restricted; but one of the most interesting stories yet to come out of the war is concerned with a German vessel known variously as *Raider No. 41*, alias the *Steiermark*, alias the *Kormoran*, and under as many disguises as national ensigns.

It is once more curious to note the enemy's persistence in names. In the last war the Germans sent across the South Atlantic from Luderitz Bay (German South-west Africa) the S.S. *Steiermark*, which used to keep the raiders at the Island of Trinidad, and elsewhere, supplied with coal.

So also on August 4, 1914 (first day of the last war), the German cruiser *Emden* in the Far East, having captured the Russian Volunteer S.S. *Riasan* (3522 tons), took her into Tsingtau, where she received the name of *Kormoran*. But reaching the American-owned island of Guam after Spee was defeated at the Falklands, she was promptly interned.

So notwithstanding the name of either *Steiermark* or *Kormoran* having earned no merit, the enemy again saw fit to commemorate them in this one ship. It will be convenient to speak of the raider by the first name, and we can visualize her as a single-funnel ship with diesel-electric engines able to remain at sea for quite lengthy periods. Thus, thanks to the present age of oil-fuel, the modern vessel bears some practicable resemblance to the old sailing ship which could for months wander over the oceans.

But the *Steiermark* was ultra-modern; indeed, like some of the Japanese recent developments, she possessed exceptionally high speed for a cargo vessel. That is to say, she could maintain a rate of 16 knots with the utmost ease, and 18 knots without difficulty. You may in fact consider her as an 'express freighter' of 9400 tons register, able to carry 12,000 tons of cargo. She measured 524 ft. 9 in. long, with a beam of 66 ft. 3 in. With a little imagination any naval officer might perceive how easily this vessel could be altered to make an ideal raider. Designed for the Hamburg-Amerika Line,

she did not complete her building till the war was a year old. Krupps had built her at Kiel; and France having now been conquered, it only meant waiting till the short days ere she be sent forth on the high seas.

It was a lesson which Germany learned in the last war, that a raider outward-bound should depart from Germany before the end of December; but returning, it must be not later than the month of March. Thus there still remained plenty of weeks in 1940 to transform this intended tanker into an unarmoured man-of-war, having six 5·9-in. and two anti-aircraft guns, but also (like last war's final raiders) with torpedo-tubes on a well-thought-out scale. That is to say, there were deck torpedo-tubes as well as those below water.

With a complement of 400 officers and men, well fuelled and abundant provisions, the *Steiermark* represented the last word as a naval decoy: yet as you looked at the bridge and funnel amidships, noted her couple of masts, she certainly seemed to your eyes a genuine trader.

When, towards the close of 1940, she availed herself of the dark nights and studiously avoided traffic till arrived in that area of the Cape Verde Islands, where steamers are bound to be met *en route* from South America and Cape Town; *Steiermark* started her campaign abreast of Senegal, sinking two British ships, the motor tanker *British Union* and the S.S. *Afric Star*.

The world with its oceans, its sea-lanes and channels, was hers now to roam just as she cared; for she had only to avoid encountering a British man-of-war. Co-operating with another German raider was not as fruitful as might have been expected, but together two sank the British S.S. *Eurylochus* before the end of January 1941. The *Steiermark* had indeed a sister named the *Ostmark*, but there was likewise the tanker *Nordmark* and it was this latter the Nazi raider met presently by going further south, taking advantage to refuel from her and to transfer prisoners obtained from the three British ships.

It was again the technique of the *Altmark*.

Still we must emphasize that for the cost in time, effort, and risk, the *Steiermark* certainly did not pay her way. In the course of her South Atlantic wanderings she now fell upon the motor tanker *Agnita* and the S.S. *Craftsman*; yet such was not a very brilliant series of victories to shew for the period between the last week of March and the second week in April.

And during the next two and a half months the *Steiermark* endeavoured only one attack, yet despite everything—speed, armament, ample crew—she could not triumph, and the intended victim managed to escape.

She then quitted the Atlantic, gave the Cape of Good Hope a wide berth and tried the Indian Ocean. After cruising most of 3000 miles from the African continent she renewed operations on June 26 when she sank S.S. *Velebit* and S.S. *Mareeba* between Ceylon and Sumatra.

The difficulties of even this super-perfect Nazi plunderer, with all the world's sea-lanes to choose from, were such that whithersoever she journeyed she created such a monument of anxiety that in the last of her efforts she must find an aggregation of trouble. If she destroyed one ship in a given area, then in these days of wireless and patrols possessing aircraft, the raider was marked if she elected to remain within several hundred miles of that region. The sinking of *Velebit* and *Mareeba* advertised her position at a certain time on a given date, and despite the transformation by paint or dummy erections the *Steiermark* could not hope long for immunity.

Her life, in proportion as victims might be added, must be of absorbing anxiety. Like an escaped convict, she dared not be seen except when vaguely outlined at a distance. The recognized trade-routes were accordingly as dangerous to her as a market-place to any wanted man. That the *Steiermark* was being sought all over the world between the Verdes and the Pacific was quite a serious matter.

So, following the above two successes, the raider dared not frequent the main shipping routes but she made herself scarce and never attempted further attacks for three whole months. It was not till September 26 that she came across the Greek S.S. *Stamatios G. Embiricos* at sea, sending her to the bottom, but once more became so embarrassed by the advertising of this latest position that for yet another two months the Nazi was too busy eluding our patrols for any zest of making a kill.

We leave her, then, in November, somewhere between Sumatra and Australia while our cruisers gradually, but determinedly, with a superior speed, are creating a dilemma. Let us presently take a glance from quite a different angle.

During that first autumn and winter of the war it was always a serious matter for a ship to break down whilst crossing the Atlantic when German raiders were not far from the scene: yet in the course of these pages we shall find recorded several vessels thus situated. Surely, suggest some critics, there is an age-long war which has existed between the sea and ships, so why complicate matters further by introducing man as additional partner in the contest?

This Second World War was not yet three weeks old when the Danish S.S. *Energi* (Captain Jorgen Jorgensen), of Marstal, set out from a Canadian port on September 23, 1939. Having got well into the Atlantic, on October 4 she had the misfortune to lose her propeller. Now the *Energi* had no wireless, and no other ship seemed to be near, so it looked as if the steamer were in a serious situation, with more to come.

But the Danes have the reputation for being good sailors and Captain Jorgensen proved himself a seaman of considerable resource. Instead of yielding to fate, he decided to rig his steamer as a topsail schooner, using reserve tarpaulins as sails. However, Captain Jorgensen had not commanded in sail previously, and many of his crew had never in their lives served in a sailing ship. Certainly Jorgensen in his younger days had served in some of those Marstal schooners running to the West Indies, South America and Newfoundland. Happily the art of the schooner is far from dead both in Denmark and Scandinavia. Often we see these ships in some English port, spotlessly clean and bright with their white paint. Even on the walls of a Scandinavian cottage the photograph of some wooden topsail schooner is treasured as something nobler than a mechanically driven vessel.

It needed several days ere the *Energi* under her new rig was found really satisfactory. Assuredly before the wind she made fairly good speed and the deck cargo helped the sails, but she was awkward to steer and driven right off her course in a S.E. direction at the rate of 60 miles a day. But still she proceeded for a month jogging along, though for 11 days they never sighted a ship. Why? Because every seafarer thought that *Energi* must be one of those decoy vessels sent out by a U-boat as in the last war.

Well, the voyage was not ended and she had not fallen into German hands.

What was more, no dreaded Nazi pocket-battleship had come along, although for 28 days the *Energi* sailed her lonely voyage. It was a fine achievement to have carried on like this, but after a month's voyaging another vessel was approaching from the opposite direction. A Finnish steamer on her way to South America. The steamer did her best to take the *Energi* in tow, but three times the hawsers and cable broke. Finally it was decided that the Finnish steamer could make precious little progress, so she got into wireless touch with a well-known salvage steamer of Lisbon named *Valkyrien*. And since *Energi* seemed headed for Portugal, the *Valkyrien* was towed thither, where they fitted a reserve propeller which enabled her to resume the long voyage.

But for his patience and skill under sail Captain Jorgensen won high praise for having done what can be accomplished by so few skippers in an age of steam.

There is more than one fine tug in the port of Lisbon, but next year there was another important job to be done by this *Valkyrien*. It happened early in February 1940. The British S.S. *Oregon* had been falsely reported by the German wireless as having been torpedoed, but all the same, she was lying 200 miles north of the Portuguese coast in a state of complete disablement with every boiler out of action and needed assistance. For four days the *Oregon* just rolled in the swell, but early on February 11 the *Valkyrien* was sent to her aid and a few days later the tug *Gai* was despatched from Gibraltar.

Meanwhile a curious thing happened. A submarine passed within range, heading to the south, and she did not make any attack on the *Oregon* though it must have been apparent from the way *Oregon* was bucketed about in the swell that here was a ripe victim. It has been assumed that either the enemy herself was in some trouble with her engines or had run short of ammunition. Perhaps the U-boat was looking out for bigger game expected to arrive from the south?

At any rate *Oregon* was for seven days towed into port escorted by a British man-of-war. The weather during this time was very bad, the *Valkyrien's* Second Officer and two other members of the crew were killed, whilst her steward became seriously injured, yet fortunately the *Oregon* was brought safely into port.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE HIGH SEAS

EXACTLY one month after this incident followed another which, differing in kind, was part of the general scheme to defeat us by ruining our overseas trade. The phase of the pocket-battleship once more gives way to the converted merchant ship, and even from the first it seemed out of all proportion to waste a 26-knot vessel with six 11-inch guns and eight 5.9-inch against unarmoured lightly armed passenger and cargo vessels. Rather

one would have thought that the secondary armament would have sufficed, and that, provided the raider could carry enough oil fuel besides provisions for at least three months, she would be more suitable than the *Deutschland*.

Why? Because the converted tanker or cargo carrier did not look suspicious: you could not be absolutely sure of her feigned character until she opened fire. It was thus possible to cruise round the trade routes with reasonable assurance that she would never be surprised by one of our regular cruisers or armed merchant cruisers. On the other hand, the raider who resembled one of the traffic daily to be seen coming over the ocean might stealthily creep up to a merchantman and at the last minute disclose his character identity.

It therefore resolved itself into a preliminary tussle of intellectual discernment, for neither rival could afford to be fooled, yet he must be instantly prepared for battle. Not artificial rules but seamanlike sense will give the Captain that something extra which so much matters and on which his tactics must depend.

The Nazis seem to have thought again after the loss of the *Admiral Graf Spee* and reckoned differently. However much a battleship seeks to disguise herself by paint and false erections she never quite succeeds, and even during the last war, when fourteen merchantmen were transformed into what was known as the 'Dummy Fleet', less than a year sufficed to banish this idea from the order of things practical. Much more useful did they afterwards become as kite-balloon steamers, oilers, transports, torpedo depot ships, and so on.

All very well for a pocket-battleship to come rushing along from the horizon towards the merchant ship, but now the latter might any day turn out to be a well-armed cruiser and it was the three British cruisers which drove *Admiral Graf Spee* into port, her men into mutiny, her captain into suicide, and herself into willing destruction. And if the English now were relying for convoys and escorts in protection of their trade ships, might it not so happen that another *Jervis Bay* would be a more deadly foe? Perhaps one of several mighty armed escorts.

What, then, the Nazi raider set his mind on was to meet a solitary ship which relied on speed for ensuring safety. The Admiralty had taken up the Union-Castle liner *Carnarvon Castle*, 20,122 gross tons, with twin screws and motors, one short-squat funnel, two camouflaged masts that melted in the distance with the sky. She had been built in 1926 by Harland & Wolff, but in 1937-8 was lengthened and re-engined as the first motor-ship of the passenger-mail type built for this line, being followed in 1930 by the *Winchester Castle* and in 1931 by the *Warwick Castle* of similar type; then from 1936 onwards by the *Stirling Castle*, *Athlone Castle* and *Capetown Castle*.

Originally the *Carnarvon Castle* measured 630 feet long, 73-ft. beam, and drew 32 ft. 9½ in. loaded, and could do 15 knots. But the new engines gave her at least 18 knots, and her low consumption considerably increased her range of action.

In command of this armed merchant cruiser was appointed Captain H. N. M. Hardy, D.S.O., R.N., and she represents the ideal anti-raider which has developed in the last two decades. She was sent to cruise about that lucrative area off South America which has always attracted raiders both in this war and the last. With her speed, radius, and gun power this *Carnarvon Castle* big ship was suitable for any of those similar raider duels of

the last war such as the *Carmania*, *Cap Trafalgar*, *Alcantara*, *Greif*, and *Dundee-Leopard* sinkings.

It was on December 5, 1940, that *Carnarvon Castle*, being then about 700 miles N.E. of Montevideo, sighted a suspicious vessel lurking around the normal track of shipping bound between Buenos Aires and this country. Captain Hardy had no certainty for his guide, but his instinct was aroused, he worked up to full speed and gave chase. The Nazi shewed his guilty conscience by hopping it to the north, and an exchange of shots began. Unfortunately the disguised German raider was at long range and refused to come closer. Heavy firing was not confined to either side, and *Carnarvon Castle* received some slight damage to the hull together with several casualties.

There is no doubt that the German was both heavily armed and of considerable speed, so that after this sudden meeting the action ended as quickly as it had begun. That the raider was keeping in touch with the Island of Trinidad is quite possible: a supply ship might have been waiting for her under the rocks, yet it is very certain that the raider was a considerable foe. Described as "a huge rebuilt passenger liner, so large that she was equipped for a three years' voyage", it is more than likely that she was one of the Hamburg-Amerika ships which used to do a big passenger trade with Brazil.

At least the enemy had been frightened away from this neighbourhood: it would be unhealthy to remain hereabouts any longer, and meantime the *Carnarvon Castle* decided to run into port that she might be docked for repairs. Captain Hardy chose Montevideo. The arrival of this armed merchant cruiser possessed something of the sensational, and crowds flocked to the quays. Outside the dock entrance half a dozen ambulances were waiting to take off the wounded, and all surgeons were standing by on orders from the Uruguayan Government; but when all injuries were found to be slight, and no cases need be removed, there remained only damage to the ship.

For this Captain Hardy asked permission for *Carnarvon Castle* to remain the legal maximum of 48 hours, but when the Uruguayan commission appointed to examine the damage had concluded their investigation they recommended that the period allowed be 72 hours.* Actually the damage had been incurred at those bows which at one period had been renewed, but fortunately it was above waterline. So, after attending to the damage, the armed merchant cruiser again proceeded to search out the Nazis. Usually when once a raider had spread havoc in a certain locality she would not continue operations but move right away from the scene: we have in fact noted that sometimes she steered to another corner of the globe. And we may rest assured that this big fellow who ran away from the *Carnarvon Castle* would have found it healthier to go where no British man-of-war might suddenly loom up. The enemy had already learned to his cost that the Royal Navy seemed to have a way of turning up when least expected. Indeed, after contact with the large Nazi raider had been broken, H.M.S. *Warspite* was seen by the Uruguayan cruiser *Uruguay* cleaving her fine bows through the South Atlantic at full speed to the northward, and her aircraft were also noted.

But it is the ubiquitousness of these German raiders, and on a scale far more numerous than in the last hostilities, that has made our task so difficult,

* As had been approved in the case of the *Admiral Graf Spee*.

though the universality of this tip-and-run business creates a general suspicion of encountering the marauders anywhere on the high seas. In the widest use of the word this is a world war. Yes; even Norwegian whalers have come into the picture.

Few old-fashioned branches of seamanship have in late years yielded to such modernization as their use of wireless telephony and of large flensing floating factories, and though we have been considerably assisted by the Norwegians' progress with their explosive-harpoon guns and steam trawler-like whale 'catchers', we too have been pioneers in a great industry among Antarctic ice. It is not every sort of seafarer who for good wages would be willing to banish himself towards the South Pole every year during several months. Frankly the life appeals much less to the English temperament than the Norwegian.

There was of course a time in days of sail when whalers from the East Coast of Britain built and sent forth the keenest sailormen of such localities as the Wash and Dundee, Hull and Peterhead. They formed a magnificent tradition and even in our own time their sons came back from retirement to build enormously stout wooden ships for Antarctic exploration.

Then gradually whaling passed into the hands of Norwegians. They would leave Norway at the beginning of September and go via South America to South Georgia, returning home in June. A number of sturdy little ships, not unlike our steam trawlers of the North Sea, but with a tall funnel, great sheer of the hull forward, a lookout 'crow's-nest' on the masthead, able to stand the worst weather in the world, they compose the fleet of catchers which journeyed from Northern Norway across the equator even to the South Shetlands.

During that short period away from home the gunner in each of these little craft could make at least £700 working without fixed hours any time of the day and night. Prices in that part of the world were of course high, coal costing £14 a ton at South Georgia, and a catcher burning about six tons a day. Now these whaling communities usually came from Larvik, Tonsberg, and Sandefjord, but it was quite an expedition which ordinarily you used to meet in some Devonshire port when coaling on their way out.

The antique days of the three-masted barque roaming the world on a three-year voyage in pursuit of the whale from ocean to ocean are just flashes of bygone history. It is the explosive harpoon directed with great skill from its gun on a raised platform at the catcher's bows, which transformed the occupation and created a notable industry before this second German war started. Averaging 105 ft. long, 20 ft. beam, 12 ft. depth, and a speed of 15 knots, compelled to endure the most atrocious weather for six days of the week, these fine little ships went out to look for the whales which, having been caught and killed, they towed in the direction of their base.

The latter might be South Georgia, with its workshops, stores and shore factories, where carcasses were handed over; flesh, oil and bones made ready to be carried by special transport ships to Europe, and thus in a generation the influence of capital and organization had developed amazingly. Floating factories, consisting of ancient liners' hulls gave way to specially built steamers with all the latest gadgets, powerful derricks, blubber vats, tanks for collecting the whale oil, flensing decks and so on. One might well ask what bearing this, now vast, industry, has on war; but the answer is that apart from a whale's carcass being employed for its oil and meal, it is indispensable in war-

time for the manufacture of margarine and glycerine for the making of munitions.

We well know that Norway was advised not to send her shipping back to a Scandinavian port and thus it came about that the Norwegian catchers and floating factories, after leaving the Antarctic, had the wisdom not to make for Europe but spend the summer of 1941 in a Canadian port.

So the weeks sped by and the time came round for the Norwegian Whaling Armada to set out south again to the Antarctic. It included the refinery ship *Olé Wegger* (12,201 tons) and the three catchers *Pol VIII*, *Pol X* and *Torlyn*. These and others were operating in the service of the Norwegian Government with an office in London, but long before the fleet could report their whereabouts close to the Antarctic ice, it had largely fallen into a German raider's trap. When the more lucky ones managed to escape, some reached South America, others fetched into Africa, whilst yet others arrived in Australia or Japan. Thus this one fleet had been dispersed all over the world, and about one-quarter thereof had been lost.

We have here an instance of the grandiose schemes with which the Nazis were imbued after Hitler had possessed himself of so many new ports in Europe from the spring of 1940; for with this newly obtained sea-girt territory and its harbours came also a wider ambition. Assuredly whaling in recent years has developed so enormously that, apart altogether from British concerns, the Norwegian fleet consists of about 12 floating factories, each factory having usually its six steam catchers and a number of tankers as transports. The method of these modern Norwegians on getting south was to anchor each factory in the selected area and to wait till the catchers should come back with the whale carcasses. Finally when the last stage had been completed and the whale oil transferred to the tankers for market, the long voyage home began.

It is not possible here to give a full list of these Norwegian vessels which perished at the raider's hands, but besides the big floating-factory crew we might mention also men from the *Pelagos* and *Solglint* who were eventually landed at Bordeaux. From there they were taken to a prison camp near Paris where they were joined by a crew from that exceptionally big oil factory *Kosmos*. The latter had been sunk in the Atlantic whilst on passage between Curaçao and Cape Town.

Fourteen weary weeks of confined activity were spent by these unfortunate sailors whose lives, both in the bracing air of Antarctica and the vigorous Norwegian atmosphere, had been the very opposite of restricted movement. Hundreds were these prisoners of the Nazis who in the year 1942 were moved further north to an internment camp at Bremerfoerde. Then they were made to travel still further eastward and so came to the German Baltic port of Stettin.

At this date of course Germany was in possession both of Denmark and Norway, dominating also the Skaggerak; it became therefore easy enough to allow these many scores of prisoners to be landed in Norway and to gain their homeland. Since first they had steamed to the Antarctic, thence up to Canada, next fleeing for their lives across the ocean, and so by a long journey from the south of France to the other end of Europe, they had certainly merited a wonderful homecoming. The Nazis, with their usual trickiness, had planned to play on such personal relief and gratitude, and it was arranged by Quisling's National Party that these shipwrecked mariners

should be welcomed at a big banquet. Their fellow countrymen perhaps might be inclined to think of the Nazis and Quislings as not such bad fellows after all?

At any rate, this feast would be excellent propaganda and dispose their former prisoners to a pro-German attitude?

Not a bit of it. Was ever a snake so neatly caught?

Given their freedom finally in Oslo, these hundreds of whaling men declined having anything to do with the banquet, and not one turned up at the feast: but all left immediately to reach wives and families in Larvik, Tonsberg and Sandefjord by the quickest possible way.

Yes: but why had the Nazis taken so much trouble about these men? Why, having allowed the raider to sink both factories and catchers, had the Norwegians been finally treated like prodigal sons and greeted in their homecoming by a display of hospitality?

The answer is that Hitler was now looking well ahead, that his Quislings realized how short would Nazis and their Norwegian protectorate presently become of such items as margarine, soap, glycerine and cattle foods. If the German whaling industry had been stopped, at any rate these Norse whalers of the southern seas would be well worth encouraging—and should be encouraged—as British sea enterprise should be discouraged. Why not in the future do everything to help these experts of the harpoon so that plenty of lubricants be kept in store; and the experts themselves be kept alive and sent—at a favourable date—to the whaling grounds?

If Germany had really made up her mind to win this war, defeat England, take every bit of her overseas territory and enterprise, besides floating factories and steam catchers, then it was from the families of Norwegians living on lonely islands that much would depend for secrets of whaling. Hence they had been given their freedom but carefully shepherded back to where they could be found. Seeing that the Nazis both for their submarines and their tanks in Russia and Northern Africa would badly need all the products that whaling affords, Hitler on second consideration had decided to approach Norwegian whaling men pleasantly.

Yes; but these natives were not so dull as to pretend they were unable to see through the plot. And families do not become more amenable by bullying: good will and trustfulness are not produced by the heel of the ruler. Then gradually those commando raids on fish oil factories, the escape of so many people to Britain, the rising strength of British airpower, the failure to reach German supremacy in Russia, the slow but certain rise towards Norway's independence—began to open up another vista.

Besides, the Nazis no longer could be sure of winning through. Not for German taskmasters would harpooners and flensers go forth as slaves.

The depths of Nazi mean-spiritedness have always been a revelation to all who pursue a livelihood on the seas. Before the war a number of Indian seamen had been serving aboard German merchant ships and were released by Germany to go home, but first the Nazis asked if the Indians would give an undertaking not to serve in British ships for the future. The united reply was firm and significant.

"If," answered the Indians, "the King of Britain wants us to serve, it would be impossible to refuse."

This reply nonplussed the Germans, who could merely retort:

"All right: then we do not guarantee the safe arrival back in your own country."

And it was only on the following day that the Huns carried out their threat; for at the beginning of March 1940 the motor ship *Domala*, owned by the British India Line, left Antwerp with 143 British Indian subjects who had just been released from their German ship and were now being repatriated.

The *Domala* was on her way down Channel when the beastliness of the threat was carried out. Between 4 and 5 a.m. of March 2, in the light of the waning moon, a German Heinkel bomber, with navigation lights burning to resemble a peaceable aircraft, overtook *Domala*, and so act as one unsuspected of ill-intent. Four bombs were dropped, of which three hit the liner, killing the Master and causing a fire to break out amidships. The *Domala* was a two-deck, twin-screw vessel with a speed of 12½ knots. Her tonnage was 8441 and she was built in 1921. When the strange 'plane flew over, it was half darkness.

Within twenty minutes the ship was ablaze from stem to stern. There was a rough sea but most of the passengers and crew were rescued by various British vessels in the neighbourhood and the Dutch *Jonge Willem*. The *Domala* afterwards anchored in port.

Typically Hunnish, too, was that incident which occurred early in the morning of February 11, 1940, some 70 miles S.W. of Cape Clear, S.W. Ireland. It was a spot much frequented in the last war by U-boats for lying in wait till traffic from America might show up. This morning the fishing trawler *Togimo*, commanded by Skipper James Gale who won a D.S.C. in the last hostilities, was at work. Fine weather, light southerly breeze, heavy ground swell, with clear starry sky, but otherwise pitch dark.

At 5 a.m. all hands were on deck, standing by to shoot the trawl, which had been hauled about an hour previous. She had all her deck lights burning, and the Skipper was below in his cabin, taking a sounding with the echometer, when suddenly he heard the report of a gun. Returning to the bridge, he realized that he was being attacked by a U-boat. So after all these intervening years German submarines were back in their old haunts. (The change of locale following the occupation of France had not yet developed.)

Gale ordered full speed and all lights to be put out.

Almost at the same time he saw a flash 500 yards away on the starboard beam and a shell burst in the chart-room below the wheelhouse, setting the ship on fire, smashing the windows, splintering floors and bulkheads, besides filling the place with smoke.

Togimo stopped, being clearly visible in the light of her own flames, while the U-boat fired shell after shell at point-blank range. Skipper Gale now gave orders for his ship to be abandoned, so they hoisted out what the fishermen call the 'small boat'. Already a fireman had been killed, but of the 10 others belonging to the crew seven got into the boat, leaving the Skipper, Mate and a deckhand aboard. The latter had a badly lacerated arm which afterwards had to be amputated. *Togimo* was blazing furiously, lighting up the Atlantic. The U-boat circling around continued fighting to within 150 yards. One shell hit the trawler's bridge, blowing it to pieces, whilst another shell burst close to the stern of a boat which lay on the trawler's port quarter, its fragments wounding the Chief Engineer amongst others.

The wounded man was put down into the launched boat, followed by the Mate and Skipper. They cast off and used their sweeps to back astern, but a few minutes later *Togimo* sank. The U-boat then approached within 15 yards, halted a while, but finally steamed off into the distance, leaving the 10 fishermen to their fate. The boat was damaged and several of them therein were wounded, whilst water was pouring into the boat through leaks. There was not much food in the boat for these poor men: only one gallon of drinking water and about two dozen biscuits.

Until dawn the boat lay-to: through the ensuing day they rowed towards the N.E. which brought them towards the land. But at sunset the wind backed to the S.E., freshened, and it became bitterly cold, though during the night they sighted several trawlers and lit red flares to attract their attention, but without success.

At dawn on February 12 they started to row N.E. in the teeth of the north-east wind. A nasty sea was getting up, and nobody was looking forward to a stiff pull. The Skipper was just about to rig the sea anchor and ride to it when, at 8.30 a.m., a vessel was sighted to leeward, steaming their way. She might have been bound for Berehaven, or Bantry Bay, or Skibereen. Otherwise not many coastal vessels come right into Long Island Sound; but in order to attract attention the *Togimo's* men improvised a flag from the cook's apron tied to a boat-hook. That had the effect of stopping the steamer, who rescued the survivors and a few hours later brought them into harbour.

The incident is illustrative of the conditions in the Narrow Seas when the enemy sought our shipping within reach of land, where neither convoys nor surface-raiders were customary but Nazi aircraft could make their swift flights even before the occupation of France. But similar efforts were being made at that time to attack from the air our shipping in the North Sea. On March 7, 1940, a Heinkel had come out to do his worst when we shot him down off Aberdeen: his mission had failed. Out went the R.A.F. seaplane tender and rescued one German as the only survivor. He had been pilot of the bomber and was wounded. So hurriedly had the seaplane launch dashed out to save him that there had been no time to lay in extra provisions, but she did carry for such an emergency a bottle of rum.

Now while a tot was being poured out to revive the German, the little motor-boat was jumping about very lively in the North Sea: the result was that all the rum was spilled and the bottle broken as she pitched.

In good English the Nazi told his rescuers not to worry and suggested that they should get out his emergency rations. So he told them where they would find in the rubber dinghy: one bottle of whisky, one bottle of soda water, some chocolates, biscuits and sweets. For these German marauders used to travel across the North Sea sky well-supplied.

But sometimes the most wide-awake German officer was less smart than the British Master Mariner. One day Captain Ernest Coultas, who was Master of the Clan Line S.S. *Clan Macbean*, was coming along. She was unarmed and had been in convoy, but that had been attacked by submarine and scattered. Proceeding on her lonely way, the *Clan Macbean* towards nightfall fell in with another adventure. The Chief Officer was on watch and he espied another torpedo, which had been fired from an ocean-going submarine now about three-quarters of a mile away, bearing three points on the port bow. By putting the helm hard over, the Chief Officer managed to clear the torpedo by inches. That had been an exciting day.

Captain Coultas now took over the command himself and with the help only of a native quartermaster handled the ship with such skill that the submarine, which had now surfaced, could make no further attack. Keeping stern on, the *Clan Macbean* overhauled the U-boat, which began to get nervous. It was a revival of the tactics which in the last war were impressed by the Admiralty on skippers of merchant ships. "Remember," they were told, "that in your vessel's forefoot you have a powerful weapon which a submarine doesn't like. And several thousand tons at the back of that weight."

The moment was critical, but with the help of a native quartermaster, Captain Coultas kept the submarine from making further attack. At a distance of 200 feet the German fired three shells, which missed. The two vessels got nearer to each other, and at 100 feet the Hun deemed it wiser to dive; but left his gun's crew in the water. These the *Clan Macbean* picked up, but in the meanwhile the submarine made a clean get-away. The pleasing thing was that by resolute handling of the *Clan Macbean* and brilliantly forestalling the enemy's movements, Captain Coultas had saved his ship.

CHAPTER X

ABANDON SHIP

In the course of passing through these incidents we have noted that the raiding of ships bearing our commerce has been by three methods: (1) by means of a pocket-battleship, (2) by disguised armed merchant vessel, but to these must be added (3) the raider-aircraft flying well away from the land out to sea, and (4) the U-boat. Such are the developments of attack that each of these offensive methods has its own technique.

Already we have seen an oil-tanker called the *San Demetrio* barely snatched from the jaws of death to life again after being shelled and set on fire by a Nazi battleship. We now pass over a few short weeks from 1940 into 1941 and follow the exciting story of the *San Conrado* belonging to the very same fleet. Different ship, but the same British sailor stoicism. And a German aeroplane that flies in the sky instead of a ship that travels under the sea.

These German long-range aircraft began their oversea campaign from July 1940: having conquered France, the enemy were now in possession of France's western coast, and a fairly early victim was the Canadian Pacific liner *Empress of Britain*. This famous ship—one of the most wonderful vessels ever built and internally one of the most artistic—was off the west coast of North Ireland some 60 miles from the shore when the Nazi aeroplane swooped down and set her on fire. The picture of this three-funnelled vessel of 42,348 tons, with a huge cloud of white smoke issuing from her lofty decks, calls to mind one of the saddest sights of hostilities.

Only ten years old, with a speed of 24 knots and four propellers, she had become known in practically every port throughout the world, and though

the aircraft had set this great passenger ship on fire, the tugs managed to get hold of her. Unfortunately she failed to make port but blew up and sank, the loss of life being not excessive: for of the 643 people on board (including military families) luckily 598 survivors were landed by British warships.

Still raged this terrible furnace, but early on October 28 two torpedoes sent by a couple of U-boats finished her off and down into the depths she disappeared. Of course the whole story has the characteristics of a terrible tragedy, but it is good to know that not many hours elapsed ere we sank one of those two submarines.

Now, having established the unpleasant fact that our Atlantic shipping must henceforth expect to be at the mercy of the Focke-Wulf, quite as much as that of the battleship, disguised tanker, or the submarine, the next problem was how to prepare against the new menace. Frankly the conquest of France found our merchantmen deficient in anti-aircraft equipment and anti-aircraft gunners; yet these convoys were such easy targets for the fliers. Finally Admiral Sir Frederick Dreyer (a gunnery expert with a genius for organization) was selected for this vast new scheme that could be relied on to protect the Merchant Navy.

Not that our cargo ships therefore were rendered immune. Once, for example, a Lockheed-Hudson aircraft of our Coastal Command zoomed out into the Atlantic mists, but managed to pick up the convoy and kept her under protection. At length the time came for her to return homewards—when suddenly she sighted one of the big Focke-Wulf Condor bombers. This four-engined long-range fellow was a veritable menace to our shipping, but in spite of getting short of petrol the Lockheed-Hudson manoeuvred rapidly and with such accuracy that presently the enemy crashed awash into the Atlantic and five Germans found themselves caught out.

Well, by similar activities over the Atlantic the *San Conrado* was being made very wide awake when today a Nazi aircraft became again something more than a nuisance and began buzzing about the sky with terrible threats. Captain E. W. Rutherford was still on his bridge and for two nights had not yet been in bed: now, however, he had just breakfasted and intended getting a few hours' shut-eye.

Suddenly he listened to machine-gun fire somewhere above, but as he reached deck a bomb burst close to the ship's side and the blast blew him down. He still made his way to the bridge and arrived just in time for the second attack, which was of great vehemence. True, the crew had stood to their posts splendidly—in fact so long as the guns could be fired—but the poor ship had been made to suffer, her engines were crippled, engine-room flooded, yet the engineers themselves were still standing by. The steering gear was broken, the wireless aerial already down.

Then was there nothing to be done?

Captain Rutherford realized that the biggest duty remained—carry on with the fight—and this he did. Six times was the *San Conrado* attacked, for there was more than one flying enemy, but through 35 terrible minutes the ship was fighting back. Oh yes; it was fierce enough, yet she drove off the enemies and more than held her own. If her hull had been damaged badly, and several of the crew wounded, the *San Conrado* slowly but quite certainly was settling by the stern.

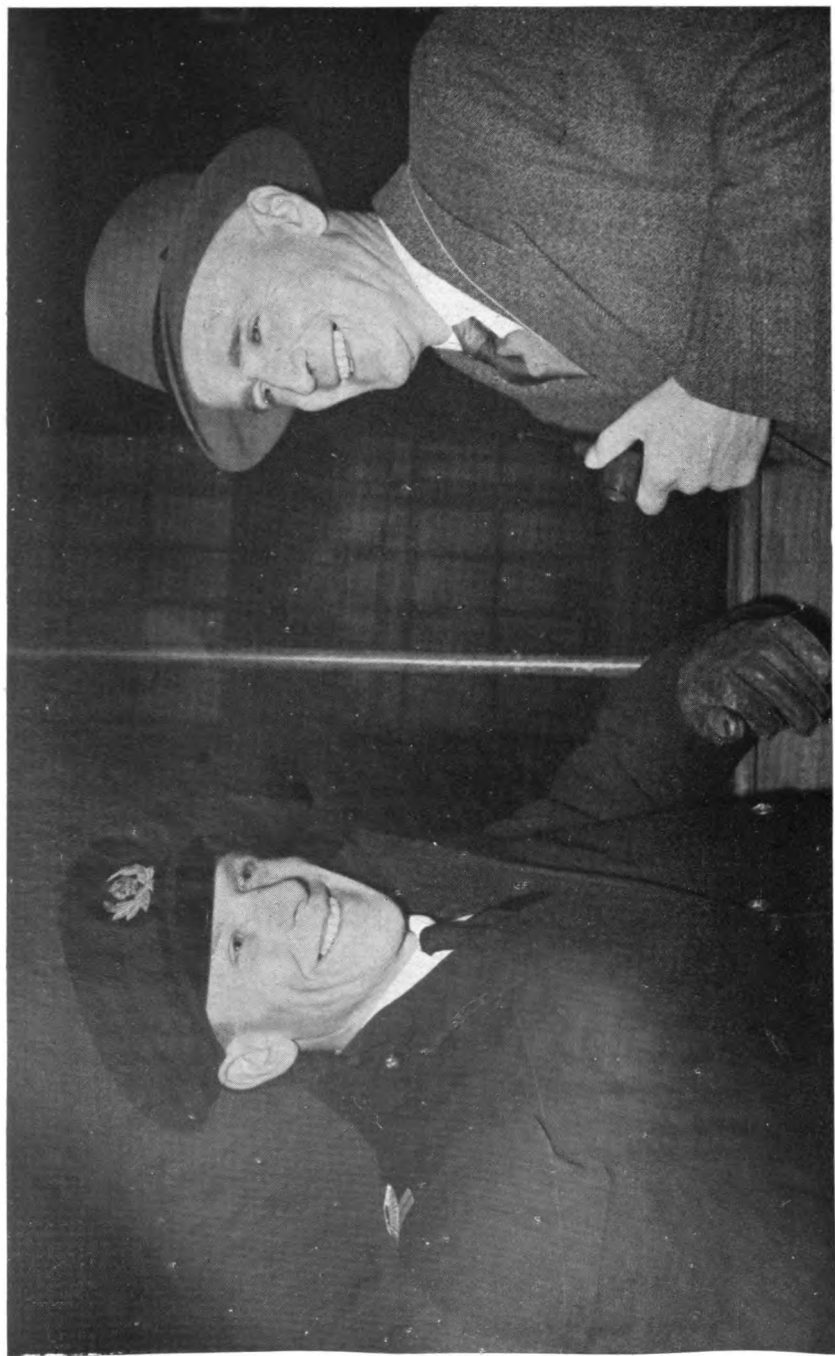
"Abandon ship!"

Another of this fleet to be thus relinquished in the same war, and again



INTERNEES

These are some of the members of the *Admiral Graf Spee* which ended her career in suicide off Montevideo. The men are here seen cooking in their Buenos Aires kitchen camp as if aboard their ship.



CAPTAIN J. N. EDWARDS (SEEN LEFT)

is here noticed enjoying a joke with the Customs Officer at Tilbury, for he was one of those who had that day landed up the Thames on January 16th, 1940, after having been made a prisoner at sea by the *Admiral Graf Spee*.

the sea in a boisterous mood. For two hours these men toiled at their sweeps with all their strength but it was a losing game; for the wind blew so violently, the men could make no headway, so all that they succeeded in doing was to keep the boat's head up to wind and sea.

At length, after much contending, with their ship still clearly in sight, they were seen by one of H.M. ships who had been responsible for their escort, and thus the wounded were transferred to a safe place. At any rate that would be something.

But Captain Rutherford was far from happy. Seeing his own vessel not yet sunk, he shewed determination, yet the *San Conrado* would no more be forsaken finally than had been the *San Demetrio*.

"I'm going back to her," he told the Captain of the escort ship. "And I want you to stand by to take her in tow, if we possibly can." Then calling to his men, "Who's coming to help me?" he asked.

Out of that willing crew he got so many volunteers that they were more than sufficed. Taking only the Second and Third Officers, he got back aboard the *San Conrado*, whilst the boat's crew he made lie off the rolling pitching hull for the present. To get alongside her in that ugly seaway was a ticklish job, and he was anxious for no more lives to be imperilled nor limbs damaged. Having conferred with his brother sailors, he decided that there would be a good chance of getting her in tow.

First of all, then, they began by running her oil cargo from one tank to another, so as to get the ship on an even keel. Next, the three set themselves to prepare the towing wires and things were going ahead fairly well when . . .

"Look out, there! Here they come again."

And fast as a squall the trio were compelled to drop everything, quit the foc's'le, as enemy aircraft again flew to the attack; whereupon the Master ordered his companions into the leaping boat. And only just in time. For they had barely got clear of the tanker than three more bombs dropped into the water, causing such tremendous explosions in the sea that their small boat was carried along by a huge wave, her occupants clinging desperately to any grip-hold which they could find. One more exciting minute!

And this time also the men of the sea pulled themselves together again, shook themselves, and found their ship afloat in spite of the bombs. Undaunted, if cursing their rather bad luck, they toiled for two hours, passed a line across to the escort ship, got the tanker in tow at last—for the *San Conrado's* engines were beyond all hope—and away went the stricken ship at the end of her tow.

The remainder of that day—yes. And part of the morrow too.

But now came the last of these aeroplane attacks, bombs fell too exactly, the *San Conrado* burst into flames and after the final effort she had to be abandoned. A hole in the sea received her, and down she went for all time.

Yet a better fate, a kindlier finish to her voyaging, a happier sequel to all their maritime efforts, had been hoped for by these brave sailors.

On another occasion, a few weeks later, when a ship was attacked in the Atlantic by three of these Nazi aircraft, the victim replied so well that of the three enemy planes which had come to do the damage, one had clearly been hit by the ship's gunners. Round and round circled the German aviators anxious to press home their attack, but with remarkably cool pluck the ship's crew resolved to fight it out. Already they had begun to indicate this, for a trail of smoke pouring from the machine's rear proved she had been hit and

that the rear gun was put out of action; so now this Nazi was compelled to fly away out of it and dared not exhibit herself again.

It was during this engagement that the steamer's starboard gun jammed. Quite unmoved by machine-gun bullets, which the enemy sprayed wholesale while the shells burst also, Frank Ferguson, serving as a trimmer, made it his job to set the gun right, yet he was just one of other brave spirits aboard this ship that would need much quelling rather than admit defeat.

For the Skipper, Captain R. E. Huggins, had given strict instructions that a couple of boys were to keep out of danger, and this they could well have done: but inasmuch as both lads shared the fearless demeanour of their shipmates and hated to be left out of the excitement, they disobeyed orders and rushed out on deck amid the lead spray. That such conduct was typical of high-spirited youngsters anxious to be in the thick of events, one cannot deny; yet it was neither prudent nor in accordance with the Captain's wishes, so for such reckless folly the penalty had to be paid.

German bullets were pouring out so fast that one of them struck a boy and laid him out. At least this youth had been wounded; but when Sam Ferguson and William Smith, the ship's cook-steward, rushed to render assistance it was too late. Both boys had been injured, but one of them fatally.

The fact is our seamen around the British Isles and elsewhere were undergoing in these aerial attacks something novel, something so different from the submarine's torpedo, which at least they possessed knowledge of. On March 20, 1940, the London S.S. *Barnhill* was suddenly attacked from the sky so that she began to blaze furiously. The incident occurred not on the Atlantic but in the Narrow Seas and within close contiguity of land. Thus it became possible for the Eastbourne lifeboat to go to her aid.

Alongside this burning mass the latter carefully approached and two men jumped aboard. They found that *Barnhill's* Master had been blown from bridge to foc's'le and was now lying helpless with a fractured collar-bone, a compound fracture of the arm, five broken ribs, a pierced lung, and suffering from violent concussion. The lifeboat got him ashore safely, and he eventually recovered his health.

This is but one more instance of how grievous is the risk to the modern cargo-carrier in these days of petrol and other inflammable spirit when collision, torpedo, or shells may bring sudden tragedy. Very differently must we think of the days when exporting tons of coal, general merchandise, or even timber, a vessel does not instantly explode and become a roaring furnace. Fire at sea has become a peril of its own, but in time of war the attacker finds a new ally in the propagation of horror.

Late in 1941 a British tanker was torpedoed and set on fire. The night was dark, and the area happened to be those northern waters where rough weather fanned the flames as they shot high into the skies. For three anxious hours there seemed little chance of saving either crew or ship, when the conflagration lessened, though was not altogether dying out.

When the Master called for twelve of his crew to render special assistance, there was a big hole abaft of the funnel, with smoke still pouring from the burning tanks, and she seemed almost cut in two; yet within five hours the pumps had put out the fires and the ship was taken in tow.

Throughout this war never was such a strain of continuous responsibility imposed on a shipmaster, for he must expect any development from the very

hour when his ship leaves port. Whether as single ship by herself, or as one unit of a convoy large or small, his vessel might at any hour be attacked by submarine's torpedoes, raider's shells, or aircraft's bombs, but he must never be surprised if fate called him to finish the voyage in an open boat under sail. We do not deny that in the last war we had some wonderful instances of crews in a ship's lifeboats making fairly long trips, but never were such excursions so frequent as began with those of 1939.

The risk of a raider from the sky, on or below the surface, leaving a ship's crew in the predicament of relying for survival on perhaps one or two open boats has had a wonderful influence on inventors. For instance, British experts designed a special suitcase radio-transmitter with a range of 200 miles for employment in ship's lifeboats. By the turn of a switch it is possible to send an S O S message which should summon aid from an adjacent vessel perhaps not even visible on the horizon. Compact, waterproof, buoyant, easily floatable, and generally foolproof, such an instrument may save the boat-load from perishing of thirst or losing their limbs through exposure.

For previously many a survivor has suffered not merely from the pangs of hunger and thirst but from frostbite and from what we speak of as trench feet, which resulted eventually in operations and the losing of limbs. Nowadays the crew are taught how to prevent this numb 'deadness' by massaging with oil—fish, vegetable, or animal—and you can well imagine that if a vessel is lost in the neighbourhood of Iceland during the bleak months of a cold season even this medical precaution is a godsend.

All sorts of gadgets have come forth during this war which would never have been encouraged in times of peace. Although well-built ships go to sea fitted with wireless and a thousand other devices, yet you will not make the sea as safe as strolling over daisies. Danger can never be entirely eliminated nor fire completely provided against. Certainly at last we have learnt to pay so much attention to a ship's boats that when we return to normal sea activities along the various routes, we shall make voyaging very different from what it was in the early ages of steam; and anyone can perceive that these provisions for safety have been the work of practical mariners.

For instance a ship's lifeboat can be emptied of loose water by a one-man hand-pump which can empty a flooded craft far more quickly than when he used a bailer. A life-jacket is provided that supports both the wearer and another man. Designed without sleeves, it is made of cotton drill and provides warmth, whilst being light and thin. Stuffed with 16 ounces of kapok, this life-jacket can also have attached a special torch fastened to the back of the garment, or the survivor may put on an ordinary lifebelt which automatically begins to flash as the man enters the sea. A buoy fitted with a lamp is another device for night rescue.

Many more important merchant ships have been fitted with lifeboats that have motors, and in the larger passenger vessels these motor-boats eventually became standard. In some cases they are capable of towing quite a string of oared craft. A great deal of thought has been expended in regard to vessels such as the *San Demetrio*, which, like so many other tankers of this oil-age, become death-traps to their crew when once a raider begins attacking. The dangerous moment is when the seamen endeavour to launch their boats whilst streams of blazing oil threaten to engulf the boats. But nowadays a tanker's crew has a light, flame-proof garment which covers him

from head to foot and protects his body whilst launching. If a man were compelled to jump into a sea of burning oil, this one-piece suit with hood and mica eyepiece, as well as gauntlets, enables him to pass through the floating conflagration.

The Germans have made a particular endeavour against tankers because thereby they hoped to cripple every sort of transport that uses the sky, or dives below the surface, whilst affecting most of land vehicles. The lifeboats carried by all tankers that ply the danger zones have completely fireproofed their hulls, their oars, their sail cover and masts. Even an asbestos blanket can be drawn by the crew over their heads, and special pumps have been provided for spraying water over boats threatened by burning oil.

These devices were worked out in consultation with the tanker companies and the cost borne by the Ministry of Transport.

It is to the advantage of shipping progress that constant research is being made to provide for the safety of the boats and men, but whilst so much has been done officially to encourage individuals with a novel idea, various firms have been putting on the market life-saving garments; shock-resisting electric lights such as could be attached to a raft. The value of such signals is that the raft might be blown many yards away from the sunken ship, but it would act as some guide to the rescuers. When one light attached to a life-jacket was found to be so automatic that it lit up immediately on touching the water and then continued to burn for 48 hours whilst visible over half a mile away, it was thought that a survivor had every chance of being picked up within a reasonable time.

But so many of these real-life stories have shown that the greatest trials to survivors have been on rafts where men, worn out by fatigue, have continuously found themselves jerked into wakefulness by being washed overboard; yet so many others, in setting their course in an open boat from the neighbourhood of North-western Africa across to eastern shores of South America, have collapsed through lack of food. But that improvement, too, has made a sailors' voyage in an open boat with the scorching rays beating down on him less likely to be a fatal gamble.

Such progress in the conditions of ocean sailing in ships' boats has been limited by the very few losses of steamers, whose crews have been forced to make in the direction of the nearest land, or, rather, towards which a fair wind blows. It was the remarkable story of the *Trevesa's* people sailing in a lifeboat that taught seafarers the practical value of tinned milk as a sustainer, but this war has impressed master mariners with the necessity of provisioning their boats along scientific lines. Ever since the summer of 1941 they began to restock them with a new type of concentrated foods and thirst quenchers, besides almost trebling the rations of drinking water. In latter years the boat contained small supplies of biscuits and condensed milk; but nowadays, when the assaults by surface raider, aeroplane or U-boat have conditioned men's survival by perhaps nine or ten days food rations, both the quantity of food and its nutritious value have been increased in accordance with practical knowledge. For instance we all know that Scott and other Polar explorers demonstrated the value of pemmican. Extremely concentrated foods in a specially designed, airtight, rust-proof container; biscuits of a new 'concentrated' type; milk tablets suitable for hungry men fighting sleep; chocolate containing a new sort of thirst-quenching substance; these are the means adopted for maintaining the men's physical strength, besides

keeping up their spirits when every fellow's tendency is to look on the miserable aspect of life.

But with this enlightened method of feeding a boat's crew it becomes really astounding to note how many days and nights, how much solar heat and damp spray can be endured. It has been found that at least 14 ounces of each type of food must be stocked for each person certified to be carried per lifeboat, with three quarts of drinking water per individual.

So much indeed have we learned in this war by the bitterest experience, that almost it has been worth while entirely to readapt our ideas on ships' lifeboats in accord with human endurance.

From the many instances which have occurred in the course of our story we have seen ample reason for providing ships with every kind of safety and comfort which shipless seamen deserve. And here is another instance of the sufferings which threaten our mariners in war-time on the Atlantic.

One night—and a very dark one at that—a cargo ship was under way about 80 miles S.W. of Freetown off the west coast of Africa, the date being January 1942. Suddenly a violent explosion occurred on the starboard quarter, hurling a seaman-gunner named Elliott into the air, whence down he dropped with four ribs broken. Then followed a second explosion, and the ship began sinking rapidly. In this vortex Elliott was dragged down until he was released and shot up again, when he clung to a piece of wreckage. It was a submarine which had sent a couple of torpedoes to cause the disaster, but Elliott, with two other men, Sparks and Frank Brothers—a policeman from Tanganyika coming home on leave to Amersham—took to a raft: one of those floats with calcium light that illuminated itself.

There they developed ravenous hunger, though the sight of equally ravenous sharks around them in the sea made them think quite a lot. The torrid heat had left the three men extremely thirsty, but on the fourth day they sighted a ship on the horizon and sought to attract her notice by waving a shirt. Apparently they were not seen, so next they used a cigarette tin as a heliograph, flashing it three times. To their great joy the ship seemed to alter course and make towards the raft. But to their bitter disappointment this was no ship, after all. The light on the sea has a curious manner sometimes of magnifying objects; and I remember one very discriminating British admiral telling me how once, during manœuvres, he mistook a British submarine for a battleship.

And in this African setting the 'ship' likewise turned out to be a submarine. But she was a German U-boat. One of the three on the raft (nicknamed 'Sparks') was the radio operator of the cargo ship that had been torpedoed four days ago. He spoke a little German, so when the submarine came along they were able to have some conversation, especially as the Nazi officer could speak excellent English.

The latter began by giving these survivors a gallon of water and a glass of French cognac.

"Be careful to drink only a sip at a time," advised the German, who also presented them with a tin of Army biscuits, two packets of cigarettes and a couple of boxes of matches. Twenty of the cigarettes bore the Hamburg label and marked '6 reichsmarks a packet'. Having thus sought to appease men half-starved, the Germans took photographs of them.

"Any of you wounded?" demanded the German Commanding Officer. Then 'Sparks' interrupted with another question:

"Was it you who sank our ship?"

"Yes, we did," came the answer. "Where were your boats? I gave you plenty of time before firing the second torpedo," said the officer.

"All but one were damaged by the first torpedo," protested 'Sparks'. Then, begging a favour, he risked the question, "Will you take us on board?"

But the German had his reply ready.

"I cannot take any of you because you are not officers," he replied firmly.

(By this remark I presume that he would have taken either naval, military, or R.A.F. officers as prisoners.) "But," he added, "we have sighted a ship. If she's a neutral I'll tell her to pick you up. In any case, I'll be back in half an hour."

And he was; he came back in that time, but all he said was:

"When I sank you, it was 90 miles S.W. of Freetown. You've drifted 60 miles. Now you're 30 from the shoals of Freetown. You should make it in two days"; he thought to cheer them up.

"*Auf wiedersehen*," waved 'Sparks'.

"Good-bye," greeted the German, and shoved off.

On the fifth day they had a good long drink. A wave splashed on to the raft and washed away the tin, but they saved most of the water. It took two hours to eat a biscuit. Still no peace, for at night there was a great fight with a shark, and in the end the latter jumped right out on top of the man, but was kicked off.

A ship was spotted a mile away. Three of the four men on the raft tried to stand up but their legs simply wouldn't hold. Besides which, the stranger sailed away. Then a flying boat was sighted and came over them at a height of 500 feet. She failed to stop, and at night a lighted ship passed, with the same lack of response.

Unfortunately tragedy was beginning, for the last drop of water had gone. Three days later the situation could be summed up in two short words:

"Sharks and thirst."

On the tenth day 'Sparks' died. The swell rolled his body into the water but it was too dry to sink. Finally Elliott developed strange hallucinations and a fever. Once he slid off the raft but, in getting back, nearly capsized this rough float. The two men, as is customary in such circumstances, began an argument. Elliott imagined himself Hitler and they engaged in hitting each other.

The thirteenth day brought better luck; but death was not far away. Brothers caught sight of another vessel, and—wonderful to relate—the vessel saw him, came alongside and threw a line. It reached the raft but knocked Elliott into the water. They hauled him out again and when they were picked up by the steamer their position was exactly 90 miles S.W. of Freetown, which suggests that the U-boat's reckoning was rather inaccurate.

Still the Englishmen's great joy—covered as they were with salt-water boils—was to find themselves between the clean sheets of a bed. Fortitude and endurance had been tried to the utmost.

When one comes to think over the trials at this time of our mariners who were risking all that we might keep alive, one feels that no thanks could be too great for these men. Even a medal or decoration would seem all too meagre.

CHAPTER XI

H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" AND THE RAIDER

ONE of the names which the Navy has twice written on the scroll of honour is that of H.M.A.S. *Sydney*. The first warship *Sydney* belongs to 1814 and need not detain us, but the second was an Australian light cruiser which on November 1, 1914, with H.M.S. *Melbourne* weighed anchor in King George's Sound to escort 36 transports of Australian and New Zealand soldiers. They set a course to pass up the Indian Ocean not far off the Cocos Islands.

The latter consist of some 20 atolls lying 700 miles south-west of Sumatra, and included in this group is Direction Island. Now whilst the Anzac convoy was steaming on her way, the German raider *Emden* steered for these atolls, quite unaware of the two British warships; but on November 9, having rigged up a dummy funnel to resemble a British cruiser, she appeared off the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company's cable station at Direction Island.

The officials, however, sent out an SOS signal on their wireless and luckily the news was picked up by the *Melbourne*, who at 7 a.m. that same day detached *Sydney* to deal with the raider. Luckily the distance between Cocos Islands and the convoy happened to be so slight that by 9.15 a.m. both land and some smoke from *Emden* were sighted.

But about this time also the German had seen *Sydney's* smoke, and 15 minutes later steamed northwards to meet her. Everything that morning happened so quickly that by 9.40 a.m. the rival cruisers were only 9500 yards apart and action began. At 11.20 the *Emden* was so severely shelled that she had to beach herself, following which the *Sydney* gave her another thrashing, so that the German surrendered. The British cruiser took up the survivors as prisoners, and then caught up the convoy.

Years passed, this second *Sydney* was broken up, but in 1935 was built H.M.S. *Phaeton*, 6980 tons, speed 32½ knots; armed with eight 6-inch, four 4-inch anti-aircraft guns, eight above-water torpedo-tubes, but also carrying two aircraft. Presently she changed her name to *Sydney* and so this unit of the Royal Australian Navy was able in the second war with Germany to repeat the fine record which belonged to her immediate predecessor.

There is no doubt of her being a fortunate ship. Once, when she got back to Australia after seven months' war service with the Mediterranean Fleet, one of the crew was heard to remark she had been so lucky that he wondered when the good fortune would end. For then would come disaster.

Luck? On more than sixty occasions she was heavily attacked from the air. Eight times was she claimed as a loss by the Italians. What with hazardous operations off Sicily and Libya; what with her sinking of the Italian cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni*; her being the first to open fire in bombarding the Dodecanese—and there were days as well as nights of dramatic suspense—this third of the *Sydneys* came back to Australia to find a tumult of welcome awaiting her.

She had steamed 80,000 miles, she had fired over 4000 shells and, in spite of all her narrow escapes, *Sydney* had not lost one man.

But now, on November 19, 1941, the *Sydney* was at sea patrolling off the coast of West Australia under Captain Joseph Burnett, R.A.N., a specialist

in gunnery and a notable athlete. He had joined the R.A.N. College at the time of its opening, and being one of its first entries was more than ordinarily fitted to command an Australian ship in Australian waters.

We last saw the raider *Steiermark* at the end of September, and even now this Nazi deemed it for herself safer, as well as more remunerative, still to remain along the Indian Ocean seaways. Off Western Australia is not the world's most crowded area, yet from Perth to Aden was a steamer track of about 5000 miles, and from Perth to Colombo little more than 3000. Provided the raider cruised one section of this coast, about 300 miles from Carnarvon on the Gascoyne River, she would be in fair position for cutting both these tracks in their approach to the continent.

Not improbably, then, whereabouts might the patrolling cruiser discover the culprit.

It was about dusk in this position that the cruiser sighted what seemed a merchantman, and closed to make an inspection. Such a necessary proceeding was always a little delicate; for if the stranger were a German enemy, the latter was being forewarned in time for a duel. Whilst the British cruiser did not conceal her own naval character, the doubtful ship with the diesel-electric engines was getting the final preparations one-hundred-percent ready for a duel. Today she was flying the Norwegian flag, so the *Sydney* might assume till the last moment here was one of her Mercantile Marine allies.

Evidently Captain Burnett and the *Steiermark's* Commanding Officer were driven by circumstances to act simultaneously. Having satisfied himself that his suspicions were justified, the former therefore opened fire, but the German gunners knew that their British opponent was only of about the same strength. The 5.9-inch guns could be relied upon to fight the 6-inch, and the Nazi torpedo-tubes to negative the Australian. One might have foretold a stalemate.

Then, with such similarity of armaments, it might be that the last word would belong to the smarter crew, but since both happened to be well-trained naval personnel, the result no prophet could really decide beforehand.

Practically simultaneous, warship and disguised merchantman opened fire, and in either case the first salvo was deadly. The *Sydney* received terrific damage on the bridge, her central control was put out of action and a fire was started amidships which grew bigger and lasted throughout the engagement; but you may be quite sure that such a vessel, with such a name, intended fighting till death. Closing the range immediately, she dealt the enemy such severe blows that *Steiermark* was crippled and set on fire too. One direct hit into *Steiermark's* engine-room made the Nazis' fate doubly decided.

Yet stalemate, with two such well-matched ships for rivals, was exactly the result. We are still lacking some pieces of knowledge, although it is practically certain we shall never obtain a British version; because, whilst *Steiermark* abandoned ship, boats from the raider were lowered, and then she blew up, but the *Sydney* was last seen on the horizon all smoke and red conflagration. That night the furnace evidently burnt itself out, as steel hull descended the depths.

Did the *Sydney* not send either of her two aeroplanes into the air? Apparently there was neither need nor opportunity. But were none of her

crew survivors? No bodies were found, dead or alive, from this vessel. Torpedoes? There is still great uncertainty as to whether the cruiser used these, but the Germans have claimed that some were fired from the *Steiermark*, although it is quite another matter to suggest that they hit.

It is conceivable that the tongues of fire on board *Sydney* destroyed what portions of the ship's boats were left after the engagement. A thorough search of the sea was made when the first German boatload landed to the south of Carnarvon with 57 Nazis, who stated that the contest began at half a mile; and that although the *Sydney* was in a sinking condition, it was her broadside which set the raider ablaze.

Aircraft sent out from Carnarvon reported also another boatload of Germans 150 miles out, and these were towed in by a trawler. On November 26 the seeking aircraft discovered, 200 miles from the coast, one of *Sydney's* lifeboats. We may wonder, then, why not one of her Carley floats was picked up, but as these were normally stowed amidships it may be assumed they were destroyed by the flames.

In the clear Australian light the aviator should have been able to note anything which floated. The body of one German sailor was picked up, and on November 27 another of the *Steiermark's* boats was sighted with sail up, on which were painted in English the words 'NO WATER'. Eight days found these men still alive, but in one boat three succumbed before reaching land.

It is true that for another five days this search for the missing, although very detailed and covering 300,000 square miles, brought no further news. The raider's Captain had the fortune to be rescued by an Australian ship; but through those thousands of square miles the combing was meticulously done by Australian and Dutch aircraft, as well as by no fewer than 10 surface vessels of the Royal Australian and Dutch East Indies Navies. When these Nazis were brought ashore they were found to number 320 prisoners. Some of these were suffering from shrapnel wounds, but about 80 had perished. Inasmuch as not one of *Sydney's* complement could be located, we lost in that action some 550 all told.

But this chapter closes with two more losses of splendid ships: both the *Cornwall* and the *Dorsetshire* were sunk by Japanese air attacks in the Indian Ocean early in April 1942. In each case the commanding officer was saved, and the aggregate of about 1100 of the personnel survived. Since the complement numbered little more than 650 in each vessel, the total losses of personnel did not exceed 200.

We do not forget that it was *Dorsetshire* who gave the final knock-out to the German crippled *Bismarck*: for that alone she would always remain famous in naval history. But as the ideal answers to the most perfect types of German raiders it is to be regretted that personal courage, seamanship, discipline, training, all vanish when an aircraft's bomb descends.

On the other hand it is on just these four qualities depends the whole art of bringing a ship overseas in fine weather and foul till safe in harbour. However wonderful is the achievement of flying, however brilliant the speed and daring of the aviator, our admiration still belongs to the sailor.

Before this war many people used to visit some of the pleasant ports of the world on board the *Arandora Star*, with her luxurious cabins and dining-saloon, her large fore-deck where travellers could sun themselves, her spacious swimming-bath and tennis-courts aft and a quaint sort of pulpit-platform

in the eyes of the ship for the Chief Officer to take his position when coming alongside. Her two funnels and unusual colouring suggested a large-size clockwork toy, but apart from the fact that she had the faculty for rolling rather heavily, *Arandora Star*, which had been originally built as a cargo vessel, was very popular among tourists.

Before July 1940 there had come a time when the Government wanted her not for carrying tourists but another class of people consisting chiefly of German and Italian employees from London hotels and restaurants. A detective would enter a West End dining establishment, address the *maitre d'hôtel* quietly, then motion him to come outside without any fuss. A few days later he would find himself aboard the *Arandora Star* bound for internment in Canada. When she left Great Britain, about the end of June 1940, exactly 1999 souls were on board. It was not thought necessary to escort her, and surely the Axis would not attack the lives of their own countrymen?

So we imagined.

Now in the German submarine service Kapitänleutnant (Lieut.-Commander) Prien had already won fame for having penetrated the defences of Scapa Flow and in October 1939 there torpedoed and sank our battleship *Royal Oak*. Thereafter this German campaigned chiefly against cargo steamers, but, forsaking any military objective, he torpedoed, on July 2, 1940, the *Arandora Star* off the west coast of Scotland. She began to sink at once, and among her passengers were 148 Germans and 470 Italians, some of whom contended among themselves with fisticuffs rather than go down with the ship. Prien is now dead, or we might have expected his defence for the loss of his own countrymen.

The news of this torpedoing on July 2 was flashed over the air to H.M.S. *St. Laurent* (Commander H. G. de Wolf, R.C.N.). This Canadian destroyer was at sea off the west coast of Scotland when, at 10.55 a.m., she was ordered to proceed with all despatch to rescue survivors. There had been no warning of the attack and Prien just sent these aliens to their doom that morning. It happened three hours' steaming distance away, and *St. Laurent* arrived on the scene at 1.30 p.m. An hour previous to this she sighted a Sunderland flying-boat, which guided the destroyer to where the *Arandora Star's* survivors would be found either in crowded lifeboats or still clinging to bits of wreckage.

In fact, when the *St. Laurent* arrived on the scene of the tragedy, ten lifeboats, all crowded with internees, were visible, scattered about the sea to windward for two or three miles. And besides many, either singly or in groups, holding on as best they could to the wreckage, the sea was littered with men on rafts. Fortunately it was calm just then but a light, confused swell was noticeable. In the midst of this horrible chaos the *St. Laurent* (a vessel of 1375 tons built by Vickers in 1932 with a speed of 36 knots) stopped and sent away all her boats at once with instructions to pick up individual strugglers and those poorly supported. Meanwhile the destroyer manoeuvred among the rafts and heavier wreckage, picking up groups of three and four at a time. This procedure was painfully slow since very few of the people could help themselves; in many cases one of the *St. Laurent's* crew had to go overboard, pass a line round the survivor and hoist him bodily aboard.

The *Arandora's* ten lifeboats were making towards the *St. Laurent*, but

the first of these ten was a power boat which in happier days was used for running passengers ashore in Norwegian fjords or to the harbour steps in some continental sunny resort. Today this boat was cleared of her human cargo, supplied by the destroyer with a fresh crew and more petrol before resuming her dismal job. Three trips did that boat make and brought about another hundred people to the destroyer.

Thus by 4 p.m., when all the lifeboats had contributed their contents and the destroyer's boats came back to the ship with theirs, no fewer than 850 people had been rescued from the *Arandora Star*. The flying-boat wirelessed that no more were in sight, so she then returned to her base. And the *St. Laurent* also set a course for a Scottish port, which she reached at 6.30 next morning. You can imagine that it was no mean achievement to have carried 850 plus her own crew for 17 hours through Atlantic swell. And later on the High Commissioner for Canada received from the Brazilian Ambassador the profound gratitude to the officers and crew sent by those Italians who survived.

Destroyers have often been called 'maids-of-all-work', and certainly their duties are manifold: escorting, life-saving, mine-sweeping, scouting, and many others; but strictly speaking it is the tug which seems always at the beck and call of someone wherever she may be lying. Salvage work, the marshalling of ships, gently nudging great hulls into dock: these form but a fraction of the labour imposed, and then they have scarcely begun.

A tug rejoicing in the name of *Saucy* hardly inspires one with the thought of great deeds, yet one autumn night in 1940 such a craft was lying in an East Scottish port, when the glow of something on fire was seen over the horizon. A ship at sea burning seriously? And no orders to go out in search of her?

The tug *Saucy* thought it unnecessary to wait for such formalities and prepared for sea at once. In place of waiting till they were sent, the crew mustered and she left harbour as quickly as possible. Ship in distress? Then it was time to hurry. Leaving port for the open sea, she steamed through the black darkness and discovered the ship to be a Dutchman damaged by a Nazi aircraft which prowled the North Sea. A bomb had been dropped which threatened to finish the Dutchman off, but just as the rescue tug came up, the merchant ship's crew succeeded in putting out the conflagration.

After some time the *Saucy* had the Dutchman in tow and was heading back to port, but it was found that the stranger was drawing too much water for entry, so for the present she had to be left.

Meanwhile, the *Saucy* went off to assist with another salvage job. Late that night she came back to the foreigner and with the first streaks of dawn again took her in tow. All day long she hauled the damaged ship towards another port. It was a fatiguing, worrying affair requiring a lot of patience, but it was completed that night.

Then, however, occurred a great climax, regrettable and sudden, yet typical of what may happen to a tug. Just after she had again got outside the harbour she hit something, and not soft. She hit it good and hard. A nasty mine! Then followed the explosion which made a hole. And down the *Saucy* sank.

In that same year, but slightly earlier, a Dutch motor-ship got entangled with a little trouble. That summer, you will remember, was full of anxious

moments: the invasion of Norway, the invasion of Belgium and the Low Countries; the invasion of France and then all the many things which followed therefrom. The seas were no longer safe for sailormen to go about their business; but one particular Dutch motor-ship sailed in ballast from Cardiff on June 26, 1940, and two days later arrived in St. Heliers, Jersey. It was just preceding the time when the Huns took possession of those islands and, indeed, German bombers came crashing their bombs; in fact, the cook off that Dutch ship was wounded by a splinter and the Master took him off to the hospital.

Perhaps the nerves of these otherwise phlegmatic Dutchmen had never quite recovered from what their own country had recently suffered at the hands of the Nazis. At any rate, one might say that this crew had become what we call 'fed up with life'. And now left to themselves by the departure ashore of their cook and the ship's Master, they themselves decided to go ashore and drown their sorrows. Adjourning to a near-by place of refreshment, they stayed long enough to become thoroughly drunk.

Returning on board in that condition, they were so inspired by what had moistened their throats that they decided to take the ship to sea under the Mate's command. Now whilst some of the crew were 'resting', the First Engineer (who had not yet recovered from a jollification that followed the air-raid) was still further 'inspired'. Bursting his way into the Master's cabin with a hatchet, he extracted a bottle of gin, and was found some time afterwards lying on the boat-deck sound asleep with the empty bottle by his side.

Of course such a mad escapade was bound to end in appearance before the magistrate, but the defence was put forward that, having been machine-gunned, the Mate had ordered them 'A strong drink all round'. When the case came on at the Mansion House the charges against the First Engineer were dismissed, and Sir Maurice Jenks expressed the opinion that Dutch seamen who had undergone such an experience were entitled to a good deal of sympathy.

It is curious how some ships and some seafarers may go making voyages across the seas but nothing ill ever seems to befall them, whilst others have exactly the opposite fortune in this war as in the last. But the summer of which we are speaking seemed so full of events, especially now that Germany possessed France, and from its flying-fields could reach shipping by aeroplane so readily as to drop bombs whilst U-boats were still frequenting the Narrow Seas.

On July 26, 1940, the Elder Dempster liner *Accra*, one of the largest vessels in that company, coming up from West Africa whilst sailing in convoy, encountered a U-boat and was holed within half an hour, while the passengers were below at lunch. Captain J. J. Smith, who had just reached the bridge, happened to be aboard the *Aburi* in the last war when she was torpedoed, and 30 of them drifted about the Atlantic in a small open boat with no food and little water. So now again, and this time almost at journey's end, he was once more assailed by the enemy. But he was not the only one to taste adversity. The *Accra* was a 9337-tons motor-ship built by Harland and Wolff.

A steward named Herbert Enright, after a lifetime at sea, was torpedoed for a third time in this war, and after being sunk in the *Yorkshire* was picked up by another vessel, which also was torpedoed. In the last war he was

torpedoed in the *Lusitania*, then joined the Army and was captured by the Germans as a prisoner-of-war, but later assisted to take German prisoners back from England.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE TRADES

THE following story of a British liner which had to be abandoned because of a German raider; and the sequel which followed as the bitter result, is really an illustration of the need for those improvements regarding ships' boats that we mentioned in Chapter X.

One day the *Britannia* (8799 tons), belonging to the Anchor Line, sailed from Britain, but on March 25, at 7.55 a.m., just before the change of watches was due, a German raider hove in sight, whereupon *Britannia* sounded a warning on her siren, but almost immediately afterwards this was followed by the boom of bursting German shells. The position approximately was mid-Atlantic and the outlook for an unescorted passenger ship on the ocean could not be envied. The best thing which the Master could do was to make a smoke-screen and open fire with the 4-inch defensive gun that was mounted on the poop. This went on for a while, when the enemy's firing ceased, but it began again at 8.55 a.m. Thus for an hour the duel waged unequally until at length the Master, realizing how impossible were the liner's chances, struck colours and gave orders to abandon ship.

A number of boats were successfully lowered and got away from the *Britannia*, but some people were trusting themselves to rafts. Let us confine ourselves to the fate of No. 7 lifeboat; and she after picking up a number of persons from these rafts, was found to number 82 survivors, viz. 18 Europeans plus 64 natives. There they were for good or ill, a mixed crowd of people with their home sunk beneath them and only an open boat in which to trust themselves on the Atlantic. A desperate undertaking had begun.

The officer in charge No. 7 set the foresail and soon was running before the wind on a southerly course, but it was quickly realized that a good deal of water was leaking through the planking and nothing except energetic baling could keep the water under control. The first day drew to its close, and at sundown one bottle of drinking water was shared by 82 mouths.

This first night hinted at their troubles to come. She leaked so seriously that they had to bale the whole night. Meanwhile a discussion as to their future plans determined them to make for the African coast, which they estimated to be roughly 600 miles distant, so they decided to change course, hoist the mainsail and steer about N.E. close to the wind. But a ship's boat intended for ocean work is not as close-winded as a 6-metre craft, and the crowded lifeboat was being asked to do something beyond her ability, so presently they altered course a second time, being resolved now to steer for the shores of Brazil. As they reckoned on the voyage being 1200 miles, the enterprise across the wide sea needed considerable hope, but at any rate

their course would be W.S.W., and they would have the help of the north-east trade winds, which meant fair breezes most of the way.

We know well enough that though a sailing ship makes excellent progress crossing the Atlantic from east to west within the limits of the north-east trades, yet for a small open boat they are apt to blow with fierce squalls which kick up a tiresome sea. The mainsail had to be stowed shortly after the new course had been entered upon and something done about those leaks, which were getting no better, but they were results of shell splinters in the recent engagement. It took some time to plug the holes with cloth and then they were covered with tingles made from pieces of tin that once formed a tobacco box.

Gradually the 82 travellers were settling down, and their spirits at nine o'clock that morning were much brightened when, about eight miles away, a ship was sighted. Unfortunately, however, the stranger did not see them in the distance.

But the general 'tidying up' and arranging of life aboard on a better basis continued. The bows were now reserved for the native crew, the native passengers were allotted amidships, whilst the Europeans were placed aft. Then an investigation of the provisions revealed that in the boat were two breakers of drinking water, each containing six gallons. Of condensed milk were 48 tins, with two tins of biscuits. Rationing of these slender stores showed that the daily allowance of each person was to be about one egg-cupful of water, one biscuit at sundown, but at sunrise one tin of milk each.

At noon of the following day another ship was sighted about eight miles off but she, no more than the other two vessels, failed to sight the little craft rising and falling in the Atlantic swell. The only luck on this third day was the finding of a small additional tank of fresh water. The tank held about four gallons and was placed under a lower thwart. This afternoon the wind died almost away, which robbed them of their progress, but it was an ominous sign when some of the natives in that windless heat began drinking sea water. Soon would such folly be rewarded by madness, and due warning was made though not with much hope.

At midnight the steaming lights of a ship were seen but again too distant for any recognition. All that constant rolling in the swell caused the main halyards to carry away, so a slight interruption in their monotonous life enabled repairs to be made, and the natives assisted in baling out the water which still kept rising. But after four days of roughing it in an uncomfortable boat, with the most limited food available, the trial on human health was beginning to tell, and several men during the night fainted. One fellow with an injured leg was allowed what space could be afforded by the boat's stern-locker, but many of them could find little more than the vaguest comfort, so that five days passed ere they enjoyed a long sleep.

The trade wind certainly was doing some good, and on March 30 they reckoned that they had covered 299 miles, so altered course to S.W. A short service was held of hymns and prayers, and men's mouths in that great salty heat were so dry that their allowance of biscuits could be consumed only with great difficulty. An independent spectator would have sensed that human endurance was beginning to crack up, and next day the native cook, having gone mad, threw himself overboard.

Yes, of course he had been drinking sea water.

Some men ingeniously trying to make a mouthwash of milk-plus-sea-

water were only slightly successful. Those restless nights for all brought about a better arrangement whereby two men who slept in the least uncomfortable positions were made to change over every hour so that each obtained some rest; but the natives were not able to tolerate this uncomfortable voyage and several reported sick, and at daylight six of them were brought round by douching with sea water whilst still not allowing them to let that liquid go down their throats. The heat was so terrific that everyone was feeling weak and the one bright spot was the excellent headway throughout the 24 hours of about four knots; and when the wind on April 2 veered now to E.N.E., the impression was conveyed of getting well to the westward and into the south-east trades.

That was all to the good, but no one could say that 'No. 7' was exactly a 'happy' ship, for the natives would quarrel with each other during the night and some became desperately weak as they cried out for water; but a slight increase in the evening water ration helped to give them encouragement. By April 3 the heat had further increased, and all were developing salt-water boils and sores, making rest in any position a difficult proceeding. A slight alteration was now made in the evening food rationing: milk and water being issued all round, but biscuits only to those who asked for them, since many could no longer swallow them even though some men tried soaking them in salt water. Two Europeans fainted during the night, others were very weak, yet the boat was still leaking so badly that continuous baling seemed as necessary as irksome. Nor did the heat get any more tolerable; the natives still quarrelled, but some effort to obtain shade was effected by using the boat cover as an awning.

Poor comfort in that pitiless sun, and several natives died in the night, though many more were approaching this condition. On the morning of April 5 several showers burst over the boat and their hopes became less unstable so that they lowered the mainsail to catch the precious water. The quantity was too small at first but after dark it fell more heavily and they were delighted to collect about two gallons. The night became very cold for everyone, but the rising sun found them refreshed, although a couple of Europeans died. It was becoming doubtful whether the boat would land any of them alive although the N.E. coast of Brazil could not be very far distant.

Before the sun had got too high the awning was again erected, since they were all complaining of feeling fatigued, weak, and ill. A short service for the two dead, and thanksgiving for the recent rains, then some tried to estimate how soon they might sight land. It was now April 7, they had been crossing the Atlantic since their ship went down on March 25, and hope had been expressed that on or about April 11 they ought to get hold of the South American continent. After sundown the grateful rains poured abundantly and they were able to collect from mainsail and foresail laid across a broken oar several gallons of delicious water, but by sundown they were feeling too wet and cold for any comfort; and to increase their sadness a large freighter passed, though all attempts to attract attention failed.

For several days a change in the weather brought severe rainstorms, all sail had to be lowered and the boat allowed to run before the wind. Whilst the men baled frantically, and one man went down with malaria, another European and several natives succumbed. Circumstances such as these, the resources so strictly limited, caused even the least dismal to ask if there

were not something possible besides slightly increasing the ration of drinking water; and a windless night left them rolling to the swell with no headway. More natives perished, many more would soon pass out.

On the other hand it was reckoned on April 10 that the boat was not far from the equator, so at least it could be said that this voyage had proved that a boat full of people can cross the ocean for hundreds of miles without despairing. Even in the time of Elizabethan sailors it became not a miraculous marvel that a couple of men should brave the ocean and arrive with their open craft in England, and we find this daring attempt repeated in the seventeenth century. Through the generations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as ships became bigger, so the tendency to entrust oneself to a boat with a bit of sail was gradually looked upon as something utterly fantastic.

Yet in our own time men have again demonstrated that with efficient seamanship, even the single-hander in a small craft can make the longest voyages athwart the world. The names of such men as Slocum and Voss immediately suggest themselves. And nowadays, when naval design and equipment, patent foods, and improved gear, have done so much for defying the inconveniences and dangers of seafaring, has not the time come for a new way of regarding wind and wave? The improved conditions developed during this era that began in 1939, and the number as well as length of the boat voyages undertaken in the war period, will undoubtedly have their practical effect in the post-war years.

But in this trip of 'No. 7' we have the consciousness that much might have been done to get away from almost primitive ideas. When the biscuits, for instance, still seemed so difficult to consume, some bright voyager tied them in a handkerchief and then soaked them in drinking water. One feels, however, that modern ideas could improve on that.

April 12 was a miserable night, wet and cold; an oil-tanker had been seen just before dusk and yet one more steamer passed moderately close. Certainly it began to look as if they were getting very near one of the trade routes of the West Indies or Brazil. Perhaps in four days would land be in sight?

Easter Day (April 13) gave them a good wind which enabled them to keep up three knots, and the occasion was celebrated by an extra milk ration for breakfast, also a short service of prayers and an Easter hymn. One more European passed away. Next day the sea got choppy and the boat shipped quite a number of seas, but it was calculated that the land would show up any time now; and just before dark a hopeful sign appeared when a seagull flew past. That night was therefore spent not without suspense, and when the dawn came on April 15 it brought them considerable excitement because as the breeze freshened there was carried also a smell of the land. Such an experience had not been theirs for weeks. Gradually, too, the sea water appeared a dirty green as if from the shore and now—most amazing of wonders—they sighted some driftwood.

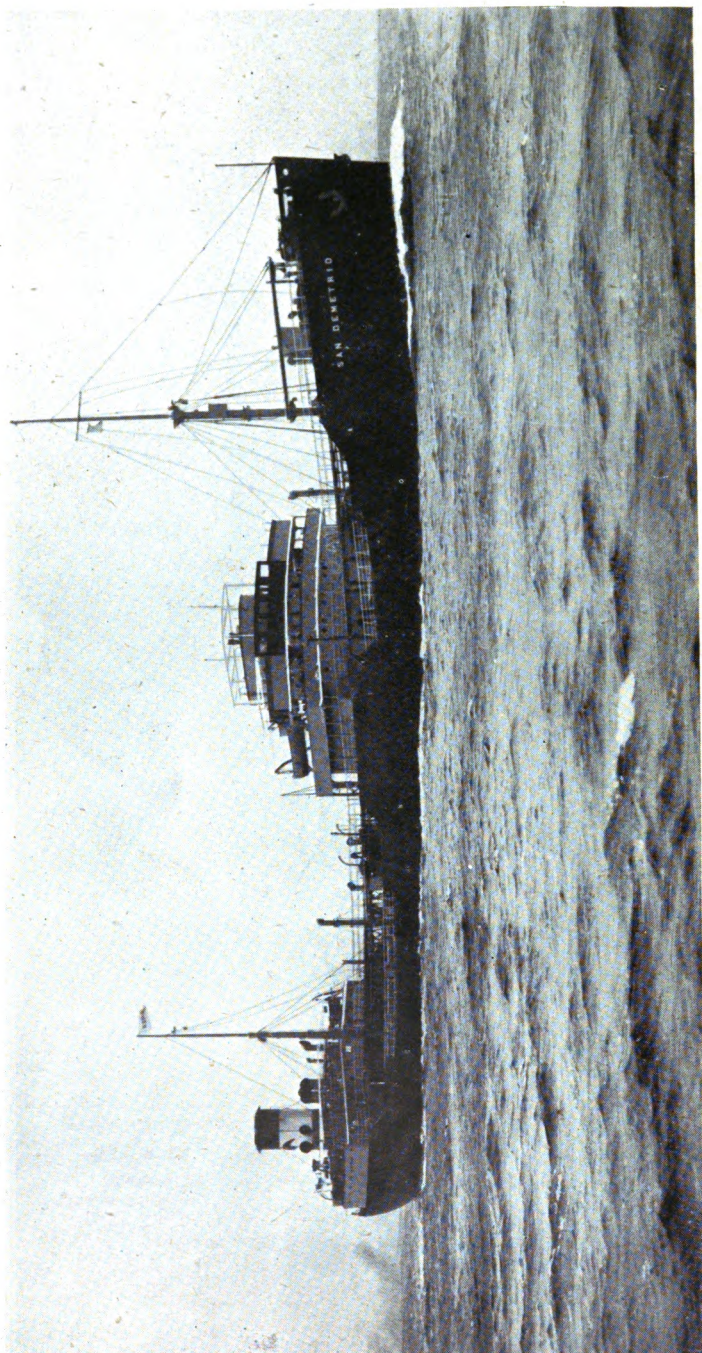
By 4 p.m. they altered course to N.W. to get nearer in to the shore, but the surf broke so badly that they stood well out to sea for the night, and not a vestige of land could they perceive at dawn; but when they altered course and steered S.W. they soon began to close the shore of some sort and by mid-day of April 16 saw it unmistakably. The party, somewhat smaller in numbers, dragged themselves on to the beach and made a sort of camp. But



The Union Castle Mail S.S. Co., Ltd.

LOOKING OUT FOR RAIDERS

This is in peace-time the Union Castle *Carnarvon Castle*, after being replaced by a vessel modernized with a new raked bow and new Diesel engines.



THE S.S. *SAN DEMETRIO*

as built for the Eagle Oil Company and being gallantly attacked before fighting her way across the Atlantic.

alas, even now one of their company perished! Met by some fishermen, they were taken to the latter's huts and stayed with them a day or two eating, resting, and catching up with sleep.

It was so wonderful once again to do these things after more than three weeks being buffeted about, fatigued, half mad with thirst and hunger. On April 18 arrived the police, accompanied by an interpreter, and through the night they went on a seven-hour journey by canoes, and on April 19 arrived at the police-station of São Luiz where they entered hospital. It was journey's end at last.

Lifeboat 'No. 7' had started from the *Britannia* with 82 survivors, and then she sailed from mid-ocean across the South Atlantic 1400 miles. Thus after 23 terrible days there survived 38 men to reach South America and some of them arrived half-dead. There had died five Europeans and 39 natives. Actually this party landed at the N.E. corner of Brazil, which is a State named Maranhao, and finally got to São Luiz, which is the capital and lies between the mouths of the Mearim and Itapicuru rivers.

This is a strange war in which the sailor, soldier, and airman have found themselves most strangely situated; but from the port, with its docks and captive balloons, life seemed full of surprises when the liner dwindled to a small boat and the latter ended up in a region of forests, coffee, tobacco, sugar, and rice.

It was the German raider which caused these steamship mariners to taste so many sorts of existence within a month, but it is curious how fate sometimes steps in and joins past events with the present sea-raiders. Permit me to explain.

I have previously stressed how careful the Germans have always been to take the fullest advantage of the world's geography. In *The Sea-Raiders* I showed how the elusive *Dresden*, after the Battle of the Falklands, hid herself so skilfully near the Magellan Straits that the British Navy failed to find her; those creeks and fjords were known to the Germans far more accurately than our own hydrographers had ventured to set down on paper. German cruisers indeed proved that their knowledge of South America's west coast was so accurate that they were troubled by the navigation neither of Juan Fernandez nor the approaches to Easter Island.

Similarly, they knew all the bays and creeks on the east side of this South American continent that never were they puzzled to find secret and secluded rendezvous where a raider might slip in from the Atlantic and quietly replenish out of sight. Now it so happens that this part of the Brazilian coast where by mere chance *Britannia's* boat touched land had been specially noted by the enemy for at least 28 years.

By example, in August 1914 the German supply ship *Corrientes* entered the rarely frequented harbour Jericoacoara, where the *Dresden* came in from her raiding to bunker with 570 tons of coal. And the raider *Karlsruhe* in that same month took the German supply ship *Patagonia* near the Amazon, where she coaled from her off Maraca Island, and after crossing the equator on the twenty-fifth of that month the *Karlsruhe* found another collier, S.S. *Stadt Schleswig*, awaiting her. So from the latter the raider received her tons of coal, giving her English prisoners instead who had been taken from the S.S. *Bowes Castle*, and presently these people were taken into Maranhao.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the Germans have long since earmarked such out-of-the-way Brazilian inlets as bases for raiding. Several

years later the converted steamship raider *Möwe* for three days in January used Maraca Island (just north of the Amazon) to coal from the S.S. *Corbridge*, and then sank her out at sea.

Well, during the second war it was felt in Brazil also the Nazis were again using some of these N.E. creeks as secret bases. If not, then how was it that a U-boat after crossing the Atlantic from France could remain close to the Caribbean, run into her secret retreat and then sink more shipping? At length so much callous destruction was done to South American and North American vessels by these U-boats that determined efforts were undertaken to investigate the matter thoroughly. Aircraft were especially employed to comb this region of creeks, rivers, and lonely harbours; reports from various quarters by midsummer 1942 indicated that submarines which operated only a few hundred miles to the north were coming into the river Gurupi lying between the Brazilian states of Maranhao and Para. Furthermore, the movements of some mysterious small ship were believed to signify the carrying of fuel-oil and food-supplies to a rendezvous for submarines in one of the many deserted bays where palms and other trees hid the shores from aerial observation.

Thus we are able to connect secret lairs of the last war with the hiding-places of the Nazis' U-boats; and the elimination of these is the first step to destroying one of the greatest dangers that threaten the world's tonnage.

German civilization has so repeatedly on land shown itself little more than skin-deep that it may not be out of place if we present an analogous example that occurred at sea on the afternoon of May 27, 1940. A certain ship was steaming independently of any convoy when she was torpedoed by a submarine. It was bad weather at the time, with a long swell, steep seas, and the vessel still a great way from land. Within two minutes of being torpedoed she began to sink and before the crew had finished lowering boats they were carried down by suction, and when they returned to the surface it was with heads submerged.

Meanwhile, the U-boat also rose to the surface and approached the scene. The German Commanding Officer came among the sailors struggling in the water to a raft, upturned boats, or pieces of wreckage. Why, do you suppose, had the Nazi come back? Out of solicitation for the sufferers? To make sure they had provisions?

No: his sole reasons were to ask the name of this sunken ship and to give the German crew an opportunity for taking photographs. Callous? This officer stationed two men with boat-hooks that they might fend off and jab at any of the unfortunates who tried to climb on board. And lest one might think this petulance was the expression of some passing phase of bad temper, let me add that it continued for half an hour. Such inhuman beasts were these Nazi seamen that they steamed away and left the helpless British crew to their fate in the rough sea. No wonder that three of our men this night died on a raft, while others drowned by slipping off the upturned boats and wreckage.

Over a day later a neutral steamer came along and picked up five men, but the rest of the British steamer's crew perished. And thus were laid to the responsibility of Germans the murders of 36 seafaring men.

Typical of the enemy's aeroplane tactics was the manner in which the S.S. *Bancrest* (Captain R. H. Tuckett), of the Crest Shipping Company, was lost. Unarmed, she was 45 miles from the nearest land when three enemy

aircraft flew over. Down below Captain Tuckett ordered his men whilst he himself steered a zigzag course as the bombs began to rain down. Then the enemy came low from forward to aft and tried to fly along the ship's length, making a wider circle and then coming back; at the same time spraying the decks with machine-guns and dropping several bombs at a time.

Altogether 30 bombs fell, and three of these struck the ship while the Radio Officer was sending out an S O S and stayed at his post until Captain Tuckett told him to go. It was wicked that any ship should be treated as Nazi aviators were treating her. Two bombs falling together blew up the whole of the after-deck, which then caught fire. On the poop everything was blown off and the top of a big after-tank buckled. Things had now reached a pretty pass. Could inhumanity descend much worse?

The Master blew his whistle as a signal to abandon ship; engines were stopped and all hands went to the boats. But as they were so doing, one of the aircraft came back and machine-gunned them from a height of 250 feet. Luckily he hit no one, although the deck and boat-ladder were riddled with bullets.

When the crew were leaving in the boats, one man—Philip Gardner, a deck-hand gunner—very gallantly would not leave but insisted on standing by the Master. Isbister and Burgess—both deck-hands—got into a small boat and lay within a hundred yards of the hull. The rest cleared well away owing to the heavy sea running and the lifeboats being so difficult to control. The difficulty was in lowering them without banging and smashing against the ship's side. They got them afloat all right, but then they were allowed to drift away. The fire was still raging in the ship but the Master and Gardner, having rigged the hose before the ship was abandoned, now were enabled to put out the burning.

The Master then called the small boat alongside and the two men came aboard. What was to be done now? No rescue ship had come to their aid, so fireworks and rockets were sent up, and three hours later a destroyer arrived. The two lifeboats were picked up, and the Master was just asking the destroyer to send out a tug and fetch his ship into port, when all of a sudden his much-tried vessel gave a heavy lurch. It was accepted as a hint; he regarded it as time to leave before too late. The Master now collected the three men into the dancing boat already pretty full of water. With a bang the rollicking vessel came down on the top of them, the davit cutting the boat in half and throwing them into the sea. Isbister was thus drowned, but after half an hour the others were picked up and the story ends with their arrival in Leith.

This was the period when the North Sea was less safe than ever. German airmen in the summer of 1940, following the occupation of France, were subjecting our shipping to the most brutal and illegal series of attacks which seemed almost unbelievable. Trinity House, with its work of buoyage and lighthouses for the good of humanity and the safety of shipping which pass on their lawful occasions, had, for centuries, been regarded as outside the scope of warlike activity. Even in the eighteenth century, when Eddystone Lighthouse was being built, King Louis XVI of France reprimanded the Captain of a French privateer for making prisoners of the men working at this structure. He ordered their release with the remark that "I am at war with England, not with humanity."

Hitler, in his fanatical ambition, evidently considered otherwise, for he

allowed the Trinity House tender *Alert* this summer to be attacked by bombs and machine-guns of aircraft. The *Alert* was on her way to a lightship at the time. She carried a crew of 39 plus 30 relief men for a lightship when the *Alert's* Chief Officer on the bridge shouted: "Look out to starboard!"

Promptly bombs started to shower from a German aeroplane, but fortunately all missed. There were three of these aircraft which attacked *Alert* twice, then raked her with machine-gun fire, wounding some of the *Alert's* people and some of the lighthouse men. It was a downright iniquitous business, since there was no question of the German airmen being unaware of the *Alert's* identity, for the ship was wearing the Trinity House ensign and had painted on the sides of the hull in 2-foot lettering: 'LIGHTHOUSE SERVICE'. Could the Nazi flying-men see these words? Well, they dived till only 100 feet away when attacking.

On another occasion the Trinity House motor-vessel *Reculver*, commanded by Captain William James Lees, was attacked also by German aircraft, though the ship was entirely unarmed as before. The *Reculver* had cleared Great Yarmouth soon after daylight, bound out to bring relief men for lightships both to the east and north. When Captain Lees went below to breakfast, the Chief Officer, Mr. J. J. E. Woolnough, took over the bridge. Hearing the sound of aircraft, Captain Lees hurried on deck, but was about half-way to the bridge when he met a messenger from the Chief Officer reporting that enemy aircraft were flying overhead from the direction of the sun. The enemy dived from the clouds about 7000 feet up and then passed over the *Reculver* within 100 feet.

Having now gained the bridge, Captain Lees took over from the Chief Officer whilst the swastika aircraft made another steep dive from west to east. The man at the wheel happened to be the only wireless operator aboard, so the Master also took the wheel, gave the ship port helm and swung across the enemy's course as he attacked a second time. Of two bombs which dropped one wrecked the motor-launch and also put the helm out of action. Again the enemy attacked from the west, dropped one bomb amidships and this stopped the vessel's engines. He dived and used the machine-gun, then finally climbed back into the clouds and went eastward.

The last bomb killed the Second Officer and did much damage. The Chief Officer cleverly shepherded the men from one side of the ship to the other. The port boat was got away with 28 men in her and they pulled towards a trawler, escorting them a mile astern. This trawler now tried to tow the *Reculver* but could barely stem the ebb; so a tug from Lowestoft and a large trawler finally brought the *Reculver* into Yarmouth Roads.

CHAPTER XIII

WAR AT SEA

SEAMANSHIP, like many other arts, such as horsemanship for instance, or the training of sheep-dogs, derives as much from instinct as education. Either nøy are born with indefinable sea-sense which enables you to do the right

thing at the right moment when there is little time to think, or you fail utterly and lose your head. Some of the finest acts of salvaging a ship from drifting about helplessly till falling into the destructive powers of surface raider or submarine, are too memorable to be passed over lightly.

The British S.S. *Macbeth*, of 4935 tons, happened to be another instance of a ship breaking down in the North Atlantic at the season of the year when heavy winter gales and atrocious seas turn a steamer into a sitting shot for the enemy's shells or torpedoes. But the number of our vessels destroyed by enemy action had become so considerable by the end of 1941 that almost any cost was worth the risk of trying to win a safe return before the enemy could know what luck might be his.

When it had been learned that the *Macbeth* in December that year, after leaving Canada, had broken down and was wallowing helplessly in the ocean trough, anxiety in Canadian shipping circles was roused, and the tug *Prudent*, stationed at one of Canada's bases, was sent out to look for her. On the face of it that was no easy problem because the distance across from Great Britain is no small item, and wintry weather makes the seeking for a lonely vessel no more easy. And in time of war, when the Atlantic has earned a name for lurking German battleships, submarines, and vicious Focke-Wulf, this is no period for bleating on the wireless. If the *Macbeth* were to announce her position, that would be nearly as bad as committing suicide.

So the *Prudent* had to do her best with limited data and go butting into vile weather with hope, reasoning of what the set of winds and tides might have effected, and with instinctive sense that the silent unfortunate might yet be found. At length, after a while in heavy seas, the courses of the two vessels crossed each other and, the tug having got hold of her, she began to make some progress back towards Canada; but it was a slow, painful business towing a 'dead' steamer of nearly 5000 tons against gales of wind and heavy seas. The speed became slower and slower, and after 400 miles the tug had barely enough coal in her bunkers to reach Canada by herself.

So the *Macbeth* had again to be left alone in her helplessness. The *Prudent* wasted no time, got into port and began refuelling at top speed before once more rushing forth to resume the rescue; but meanwhile from this side of the 'herring-pond' it was decided to send out another tug, and the well-known Dutch tug, *Zwarte Zee*, with her Dutch crew, had been chosen. This vessel happened to have been among those which threw in her lot with our shipping after the Nazis invaded Holland in the spring of 1940.

For deep-sea towage, such jobs as hauling some mammoth floating-dock across the world to Singapore, or a cumbersome dredger to another port, or rescuing a rudderless vessel from oceanic disaster, there is nothing to beat the seamanlike skill of the Dutch tug-masters who have for years made a speciality of this art. Before the war Rotterdam was always the world's home for this fleet of tugs owned by Messrs. L. Smit and Company. For the present that home has been taken away from these vessels, but we are glad to have the advantage of their ability in days when so many ships have with difficulty been dragged at last into safety.

The achievements of these tugs from the Low Countries would fill a volume of high adventure and seaman patience. Such of their exploits as when they towed a floating-dock from the Tyne to Trinidad; an obsolete Spanish warship from Ferrol to Swinemunde; or the *Kronprinzessin Victoria* from Las Palmas to Antwerp after she had lost a propeller; or another floating-

dock (big enough to admit a 7000-ton steamer) all the way from Wallsend to Callao in Peru, a distance of 10,260 nautical miles, incite our admiration and wonder.

Today the *Zwarte Zee* went out into the Atlantic and a nice job she let herself in for, for the wind and seas were to reach supreme limits as they shook off the land on the way out, but the *Macbeth* must not be given away to the Nazis. The *Zwarte Zee's* lifeboat and jollyboat were washed overboard, a raft washed overboard, all hatch covers torn away, and at times this vessel, which has the extraordinarily high horse-power of 1500, could make no more headway than five knots. Nevertheless she managed her distance and discovered the *Macbeth* rolling heavily in a beam sea, and a little while later the refuelled *Prudent* again joined the cavalcade.

The tough job of getting *Macbeth* safely home was finally left to the *Zwarte Zee*, and the *Prudent* ordered back to Canada. From the first it seemed a pretty cheerless undertaking for the Dutchman. The *Macbeth* had no steam on her winches, which didn't make things any easier; but first the tug was handled extremely cautiously in the swishing seas that burst over and threatened to throw the gear into hopeless confusion. In spite of pumping oil to calm the waves, the Dutchman steamed close to the *Macbeth's* starboard side by the fo'c'sle. To stand on deck was a great effort, everything was moving violently, yet in spite of hail- and snowstorms the tug passed a heaving-line across to which was attached a 3-inch manila, and that in turn was fast to a heavy 6-inch towing-wire which, after a mighty struggle by the whole crew, was made fast to the *Macbeth's* anchor cable.

The task of linking up in that dreadful weather and not being smashed to little pieces by steel hull banging against a heavier side was a terrific trial for even the ablest seaman, but at last the tug began to go ahead and the broken-down steamer to follow. Neither of them was in any fit condition for fighting any sort of German; bad enough to contend against waves and wind. With the long length of tow spanning the seas, and careful steering, things gradually began to look better, and then, as further encouragement, the weather slowly got better.

During six days and nights the *Zwarte Zee* towed the steamer 900 miles across the Atlantic and crowned their toil by getting the *Macbeth* safely into port. They had cheated the Nazis of one prize which went too long abegging. But it was only sea-sense and patience to endure hard knocks that saved the broken-down steamer.

This the Admiralty recognized when they sent a message to the *Macbeth's* Master, Officers, and crew congratulating them for their 'stout-hearted endurance', whilst the Commander-in-Chief signalled the *Zwarte Zee's* people his congratulations, and in Canada the naval authorities similarly praised the *Prudent's* skill in having located the steamer.

Quite properly much stress has been laid on the considerable losses to shipping which, owing to enemy action (but especially by the U-boats), occurred in the Atlantic. But less emphasis has been placed on the work being done to win back for the Mercantile Marine those damaged ships that we can so ill afford to lose. In the first two years of war (September 1939–September 1941), by means of this system we were able to save many thousands of merchant tonnage. That in itself was a profound fact, but not less important was the recovery of valuable cargoes and valuable lives of men.

We must, however, be careful to differentiate. Under the Salvage Depart-

ment of the Admiralty an organization is responsible for getting back ships and cargoes situated near our shores and for taking these vessels to the yards for repairs. But a totally different matter is the Rescue Tugs Department which deals with such vessels as have been disabled away from the coast by weather or U-boat. One might think of them as a sort of particular ambulance ready for these casualties.

The Rescue Tugs were requisitioned quite early in the war, and when there threatened to be raiders operating beyond the seas the matter became complicated. To begin with, we have never possessed a big fleet of ocean-going tugs, although there are plenty of river tugs such as operate in docking and undocking our liners in places like the Thames, Mersey, Southampton. But we were compelled to form the nucleus of this Rescue Tugs section simply, and to fetch such craft where existing in China and Australia. That still fell short of the great fleet we should need, so we began building them in this country, the design being based on those which had proved themselves especially useful, and suitable improvements from standard designs were likewise embodied.

Already we have called attention to the Dutch as specialists in this class of work; and as the war developed we were to profit during 1940 in a curious manner. When the Low Countries were over-run we became only too pleased to welcome tugs and their crews over here. Similarly, after France became occupied in the north some of their tugs escaped across the English Channel to southern England. But in addition to this British and continental list of tugs and those from across the dominions, we were able to purchase some from America. So valuable became this amassed fleet that during the first couple of years, no less than one million tons of merchant ships were safely towed to safety both in waters fairly close to our island and in some cases, as we have already mentioned, only after going several hundred miles into the Atlantic.

The tugs which thus defeat some of the worst efforts by surface raider, submarine, or aeroplane generally fly the White Ensign, though some still fly the Red Ensign. There are about a thousand personnel of the Rescue Tugs service, and they form a wonderful organization of hardy, courageous seamanhood so that scarcely ever is a tug kept in port by stress of weather. The arrival of those Netherlands tugs in 1940 saw them flying their national flag, and it was in May of that year that their country was invaded; but the value of their arrival in our waters was quickly proved, since by October 1941 they had saved some 250,000 tons.

To give a complete list of what we owe to such seamen would take up too much of our space. But it is well to remind ourselves how some of them shot down Nazi aircraft over the sea, while others, by performing their ordinary seamanlike avocation, were doing their utmost for those who would break the spirit of German foes.

We related how the tug *Zwarte Zee* rescued the S.S. *Macbeth* and brought her through foul weather to Britain. But there was another tug which went in boisterous weather to seek the broken half of a large tanker. She found the job which had to be towed and for eight and a half days patiently toiled with that tanker astern, this tug having been out in very heavy weather fighting her way for 14 days. The duties of these sea-going tugs were as miscellaneous as mighty, and they might come suddenly at the end of peaceful routine. One tug, for instance, found herself called

upon in a hurry to save a valuable though damaged ship from foundering altogether. Actually she became so deep in the sea that her decks were awash and she was drawing aft 54 feet of water. In such a case the difference between loss of ship and keeping afloat is that determined only by the tug. She exercised her brilliant patient seamanship, stuck to the task and finally brought the injured ship to the value of many thousands of pounds into safety.

The truth is that a tug sent to sea never knows how her duties may end before getting back to harbour. There was one occasion when a tug had to be ordered out to fetch in a ship that had been disabled. The stricken vessel was located all right but the weather became so atrocious that it was impossible to pass a line aboard, and when it is as bad as that a tugmaster is completely defeated: Nature completely dominates the situation. However, whilst waiting for the wind to ease up, there was still something which he could attempt. Another vessel was known to have sunk in the vicinity, so he filled in the time cruising around in the hope—not a very lively expectation—that there might still be some survivors. Eventually, despite the seas, he ultimately rescued 87 men, got them on board and kept them there for nearly a week, to their immense gratitude. But even the roughest weather at length has its easy patches, and the tug steamed back now to her original job, and brought into port the disabled ship.

In different stages of the war German raiders on the surface were replaced by submarines for various reasons, but always the possibility of some armed supply-ship as a decoy had to be reckoned with. In either case the certainty of some ruthless Nazi fanatical Commanding Officer could be expected who would brush aside legalities.

Now, just to get our dates quite clear, let us again remind ourselves that it was not until May 10, 1940, that Germany officially became at war with Holland, but weeks before then Captains of U-boats would illegally make their raids on Dutch shipping if they felt like doing such things. Take the incident of the S.S. *Burgerdijk*, owned by the Holland-America line. She was a ship of 6853 tons register, under Captain Sjiwaner.

Carrying a cargo of 4000 tons of wheat, 2000 tons of soya beans, 200 oil-drums, 500 tons of flour, 4000 empty wooden barrels, and other goods, though no mail, she started out from New York, but there the British Consul advised that since all the commodities were destined either for the Dutch Government or at any rate Dutch firms, the *Burgerdijk*, after getting into the English Channel, must first call at Falmouth. This annoyed Captain Sjiwaner, who had no intention of swerving from the direct New York-Rotterdam route of his own free will. Unless held up by a British destroyer, he intended to carry on home. . . .

Well, it happened that no British destroyer held him, and all went well. On February 10, 1940, when seven miles from the Bishop's Rock there appeared a U-boat on the surface and signalled that the *Burgerdijk* was to bring his ship's papers and not to use his wireless. The Dutchman stopped, lowered a boat, and in it went Chief Officer Dijk with four seamen. They rowed over to the German submarine Captain. The Dutch Chief Officer went aboard and was met by the German Commanding Officer, a man about 24 years old, who refused to give Dijk his name. On the submarine's bridge was painted the pretended number "X 2" and a picture of a spitting cat with an arched back. The following conversation now took place.

The German having inquired when the *Burgerdijk* had left New York was answered, but when he further wanted to know what cargo was being carried Dijk told him and offered to show him the paper. This the German pretended to brush aside.

"*Ach nein!* I am not interested in ze paper," he snapped out, quite forgetting what he had asked for in the signal. And the Chief Officer continued to unfold the stowage plan.

But the Nazi stopped him and wanted to know something else.

"Empty barrels?" he repeated. "What are empty barrels? Yes?"

The visitor translated this into German, whereupon came another demand.

"And what are you doing with empty barrels?" sneered the submarine expert, and at the same time handed the documents to one of the German crew. Dijk never saw these papers again; evidently the Hun was keeping them till someone less inexperienced in such matters might examine them in Germany. But the German Commander added, as if summing up the whole incident:

"I regret that I must sink you," he announced decisively.

"Sink us? By what right are you going to do that?"

"Because your ship has been zig-zagging."

"That is not true. She has done nothing of the sort. . . ."

" . . . And I am perfectly sure the *Burgerdijk* was on her way to an English harbour."

"But I tell you she had no such intention unless held and forced to."

"And I tell you that the wireless operator aboard *Burgerdijk* has been flashing signals."

"I deny that utterly. Our operator was strictly forbidden by the Captain to send signals."

But the headstrong Hun declined to take any further interest in the subject. Giving orders for one of the torpedo tubes to be made ready, the German then gave Dijk and the whole crew half an hour in which they must take to the boats.

Captain Sjiwaner received his sentence and unjust condemnation, but sent the following radiogram which would be picked up in Rotterdam with the following cryptic message:

Collision ship sinking 5 miles Bishop Rock.

The owners would understand that for the present and it would not incite the Germans' anger.

As Dijk was on his way back to the ship, his Skipper hailed him:

"Is it all right?"

"No. It's not all right. Everyone take to the boats. He's going to sink the ship."

There was just time for the Captain and his crew of 48 to get into three boats and pull clear. Then the Nazis did their worst. Captain Sjiwaner with tears in his eyes watched the torpedo explode and his beloved ship go down in flames. Next, after rowing about the English Channel homeless, at last they were picked up by another Dutch steamer—the *Edam*—and so got back to Rotterdam.

I have given this episode because it illustrates the typical high-handed

arrogant nature of the people against whom we had declared war, who likewise did not hesitate within the very waters that wash our shores to commit an act of piracy against a neutral. But this incident shows how insincerely the Nazi mind was working; for three months later, to the day, without rhyme or reason the Nazis began to destroy Rotterdam as they had destroyed the *Burgedijk*.

And note how the Nazi mind will twist and turn facts around wherever it suits his purpose. This time the scene is Norway and only less than a fortnight before that country also was invaded.

It was on the night of March 26-27, 1940, that the German submarine *U-21* went aground on the rocks near Mandal at a very exposed point east of Ryvingen Lighthouse, which of course is on Norway's southern coast a little west of Christiansand. She was sighted in the morning when the Norwegian naval authorities sent over an aeroplane and also some inspection vessels; but at noon, having got assistance from a German trawler which happened to be passing, *U-21* was refloated and brought into Mandal Fjord. There the Norwegian Government interned her for the present.

At once the German Legation requested the release of *U-21* alleging that she had been forced to enter Norwegian waters only because of the rough seas. That was a typical German untruth, because the weather was not so bad as to cause her to seek shelter from the sea. The Norwegians, after probing the matter, determined that the reason *U-21* had come right into territorial waters was not because of weather: the submarine had made an error of navigation, and discovered her mistake too late.

The Germans showed great indignation when orders were given on March 28 to confirm the internment and disarm the crew. Certainly it looked as if this humiliation would do the young German Commander a great deal of good. But just then things were rapidly ripening for a big event that would obliterate such an incident, for on April 9, 1940, the Germans invaded Norway and *U-21* ceased to be an internee.

Readers will recollect that in the early hours of April 9, 1940, the Germans invaded Denmark and Norway. Now at nine o'clock that morning the British S.S. *Fylingdale*, Captain Pinkney, Master, was hailed by a passing Swedish steamer who asked:

Have you heard there are German troops in Bergen?

Curious news! Strange information! For only thirty-six hours previously Captain Pinkney himself had been in Bergen. Still, big and little events of sorts were happening and it was difficult just now to decide which to be believed. For Captain Pinkney was in charge of a Merchant Convoy numbering 37 ships, of which he happened to be the leader. This convoy had assembled in a narrow fjord and there was little enough room for ships to manoeuvre whilst collecting; but on their way towards the mouth two German aeroplanes were observed to fly inland. Just then a wireless message was brought up to Captain Pinkney's bridge instructing all British vessels in Norwegian waters to sail immediately.

Captain Pinkney was not quite certain what to make of things but got ready to obey that telegram. He turned his ship up the fjord and at this moment saw the German tanker *Skagerrak* come round its southern corner; but the German shortly afterwards bolted back. Something happening!

They heard the *Skagerrak* sending a code message to "Deutschlandsender Oslo" without any of the usual preamble. Within a few hours the *Skagerrak* had scuttled herself.

Yes; quite true that something quite unusual was happening and it were useless to stop here any longer to inquire.

Captain Pinkney therefore hoisted the signal:

Convoy proceed to sea at once.

Of the 37 ships therein 31 were neutrals. So, would they follow that signal?

The *Fylingdale* moved up the fjord with her signal flying, turned at the end, and moved slowly out to sea—all of them. Things seemed to go well until 4.30 p.m., when the *Fylingdale* sighted three warships hull down on the horizon. Other units of the convoy saw likewise and wondered. A lot of bunting fluttered as all sorts of questions were being asked by the convoy.

Warships in sight! What do you intend to do?

It was difficult for this lonely man, charged as he was with heavy responsibility, to make clear decisions instantly, looking into the fickle April weather of the North Sea. Besides, he had far too many things to classify than answer all those very tiresome questions. Then he made up his mind. German ships?

He hoisted the signal to *Scatter!*

He trusted they would be quick about it. He had held on too long and brought these neutrals to their decks.

Too long? But had he?

The three warships came nearer and nearer . . . until, just as the first flashes from the guns were expected . . . they turned out to be British men-of-war coming as an escort to meet the convoy. Captain Pinkney breathed a sigh of relief; the scattered convoy collected themselves again and then sailed on towards England.

It was something of a change from the usual. This turned out to be the last convoy to leave Norway.

It is natural enough that when a convoy is bombed the ships are thrown out of line into confusion. There was one instance in 1941 where an enemy dropped 12 bombs by five aircraft and damaged the steering-gear of one ship so that she became out of control, but ere the engines could be stopped she collided with another merchantman which was next in position. It was an exciting minute, but the Master put helm hard to starboard and turned what would have been an end-on ram into a glancing blow. Such incidents are as inevitable as convoys themselves; but worse kinds of damage to be endured were those which occurred by night whether by the enemy's direct responsibility or casually.

Once, a ship was damaged after dark by an explosion which killed the Chief Officer and wounded 25 of the crew. Her stern was under water and her bows rose in the air; life-rafts were scattered over the decks, boats were turned into matchwood.

It was another exhibition of Nazi vehemence. The ship began to settle

down. The boatswain, Arthur John Webster, whose left wrist was broken, saved the life of the ship's second cook (who had become unconscious and badly burned). Swimming with him towards a raft ensured his safety. But the assistant steward, James Thomas, became trapped in his quarters with a messmate who had a leg and foot broken. The ladder to the saloon had been blown away and though himself injured Thomas climbed out; then, wrapping a tablecloth round the injured man, he managed to pull him out, lower him down into the water, where he was kept afloat by his lifejacket. Finally he was picked up and rescued.

Life on the sea in all its phases was a terrific institution in those days. In 1941 a convoy escort vessel was racing in the Atlantic to the aid of a British rescue-ship full of injured survivors from a mercantile craft that had been previously sunk by U-boats. Unfortunately the rescue-ship got on fire. Other ships came along after some hours and found the sea dotted with rafts and boats all full of injured.

The convoy was having a bad time, and it was believed that about a dozen U-boats, hunting as wolves in a pack, were searching for her. Later on it was thought that the convoy had been sighted on the surface by a submarine some miles away. About midnight the convoy was attacked by a star shell. Two ships had already been torpedoed and the survivors picked up in the black night. Search was made for one of the U-boats and depth charges dropped. Presently an attack was made by aircraft against the convoy. Men were picked up from boats and rafts but with burns on their limbs and machine-gun wounds, for a Focke-Wulf Condor had sprayed the ships with machine-guns before dropping their bombs. The bullets had torn through the sick bay, exploding in the hold below and causing a huge fire. Injured men fell through into the frightful furnace as the sick bay collapsed, and these sick men were turned into corpses. When the burnt-out shell of this ship was found by the convoy she was still throwing up a pall of smoke, so she had to be sunk by gunfire.

One learns another warning about ships keeping together in formation, for two rafts carrying five men were sighted presently. Their vessel had been sunk by a U-boat because, having straggled the previous night from her convoy, she was torpedoed before being able to join up again. But gradually survivors from this convoy were picked up until the young man acting as temporary doctor was kept continually busy. He came from a well-known London hospital and had considerable experience in mass casualty work during London blitzes. Convoy work kept him busy attending to those wounded in the attacks, such as the patient who had been wounded by a piece of shell six inches deep. Without an anaesthetic the wound was probed and the piece of jagged shell removed. One had lost an eye, another had his right hand almost burnt away. They were at last able to have the solace of a hospital, but how valiantly had these ships and men contended for existence on the ocean!

Some of those gallantries performed in ships big or little, fast or moderate speed, will be told and retold by shipmates; others will forget the yarns because their memory has been replaced by tragedies even more bitter. But never in the long and varied story of our Merchant Navy has this service amassed so wondrous a collection of brilliant achievements.

Incidentally, this list of brave and heroic sea-deeds will inspire the next generation and those to come after, with a record tradition that will lure

men to ships and the sea as never have they been called since the days when sail ruled the ocean.

A 30-year-old young man from Sunderland could hardly live and die in that part of the world uninfluenced by the sea. So many of his contemporaries were serving the sea in some sort. His father, a ship's engineer, had already been torpedoed five times: three times during the last war, twice during this. But when Henry Herbert Read had settled down to the life of a shop-assistant at least there was one person glad. That was his mother. But Henry decided that now he must leave home and go afloat. Confident of himself, he was convinced also that Hitler had to be put down. The time was now. Two of Henry's brothers were already serving in the Royal Air Force, another was serving in the Army. In a while Henry would end his voyaging, return to Sunderland and marry Miss Marjorie Willis.

So, despite his mother's pleadings to let the sea alone, Henry laughed all objections aside and went afloat. As happened in many cases, his ship was overtaken by a Nazi aircraft. The plane swooped, raked the ship with bullets and shells, and his ship's gun answered. Then followed a lull for a time, in which Read heard his Skipper's voice asking him a question.

"Are you all right?" inquired the Master of the ex-shop-assistant, now a gunner.

"I can carry on, sir," came the man's reply; but there was more to follow.

The Hun aeroplane came back. Read returned to his gun as more bullets began to descend.

This time the Chief Officer was hit. Read ran across the bridge, picked him up, carried him down two ladders to the deck below and placed him under the shelter of a lifeboat. Then returning once more to his gun, Read fell dead with several wounds in his stomach.

And when the news came to Sunderland it was Miss Willis who remarked:

"All that I now possess is a memory. But," she added, "how proud that memory is!"

And in many a home in England darkened by the deeds of Hitler's men that same emotion of pride for a brave deed in one of our ships still lingers on.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW RAIDERS

THROUGHOUT her long history Italy has never been fond of the sea, and whenever she has been compelled to build a Navy it has been not because her people delighted in marine warfare but from a feeling of arrogance among nations.

The Nazis at the beginning of this war started their campaign of raiding our sea-borne commerce because they possessed a fleet of insufficient strength to meet our capital ships in battle. The most that they could do was to direct their attention against a mercantile fleet, at first by surface-raiders

and submarines, then by aeroplanes and submarines ; but the surface-raiders were less relied upon as such. Still, as we have seen from these pages, the Germans put up a good show when their special class of converted tankers were able to roam all over the world.

Next the Italians made a mild bid to employ converted merchantmen and lurk about the trade-routes. Not that they possessed any experience of this kind of warfare, and their knowledge could be obtained only second-hand from the Germans, who have been raiding during two naval wars. To do the work efficiently one has to select from a commercial navy of suitable vessels, and it is only within comparatively recent years that Italy has been able to build up a suitable mercantile fleet, but Mussolini did his best. And within the few years which immediately preceded this war something was beginning to take shape, but in a curious manner raiding and fruit-carrying have become associated. Let us explain. The Duce conceived the plan in 1935 of developing the trade of bananas grown in an East African colony and shipped across to Italy.

To carry this fruit, a company was formed called the Regia Azienda Monopolio Banane of the Italian Government (called, for short, *Ramb*, after the first initials of the four words), and this organization dates officially from January 1, 1936. At first they chartered Norwegian vessels, but from March 1936 the Italians began to build in their own country four of a special type. They were considered as something very special and an enormous amount of trouble was expended on them from the very first.

Abyssinia was intended to pay its way, Italy aspired to become rich from its colonies, and no fewer than four motor-ships (named *Ramb I*, *Ramb II*, *Ramb III*, and *Ramb IV*) were launched to carry fruit and passengers from Africa through the Suez Canal to Genoa and back again. They would bring out from Italy military stores and general cargo but would load up with bananas for their homeward voyage.

That was their professed reason for existence and no doubt it was their primary intention. We said that enormous amount of trouble was used. First of all five different models were made and tested in the experimental tank and so at last was evolved the pattern of a motor-vessel 3667 tons with a length of 354 feet, beam 47·9 feet, and depth 28·7 feet. The engines were manufactured by the Fiat Company. The speed obtained was 18½ knots, but as a result of these experiments about one quarter of the required horsepower was saved.

The hull obtained from these designs had fine lines with about 7·4 beams to the length. The round raking bow was balanced by a cruiser stern, and the exhaust came out by one funnel. She was built with a double bottom and all four *Ramb*s were found a great success in speed, handiness, and internal arrangements. They carried only about a dozen passengers, but that did not matter for their kind of trade, and they could take out a good deal of petrol for lorries and other transports.

Such, then, was the original commercial idea. But when Italy entered the war and learned of German successes with raiders transformed from merchantmen, the Duce determined to try a hand in this venture. His seafarers had never ventured in that manner previously and a nation who engages in surface-raiding must either have a great deal of confidence or else much skill. It is largely the same kind of technique as that of the Q-ship, which also pretends until the last minute that she is an innocent trader.

In the last war we had considerable experience of the Q-ship, and Germany largely developed the surface-raider; the United States also was anxious to fit out such a decoy as might lure the submarines to their death.

A steamer of 2794 tons was selected, assigned to the U.S.N., fitted with cleverly concealed 4-inch guns, 12-pounders with tilting mountings, four torpedo-tubes, searchlights, secret wireless—in fact, every refinement that could be thought of in those days. Her American naval officers and crew were all on the top line, keen and efficient. In her fitting-out all the resources of Queenstown dockyard had been used, nothing had been neglected in the months of providing a perfect fighting machine.

Yet not only did she never sink a German submarine but was herself sunk by a U-boat's torpedo within six hours of first setting forth. That, of course, was mere hard luck, for the American Captain was a very able destroyer officer, cool, resourceful, who understood a Q-ship's technique.

An Italian, however, does not make a brilliant naval officer, and my own experience is that as specialists in surface-raiding they are neither cool nor resourceful, but likely to crumble up unless everything is going in their favour. When the British Admiralty announced in March, 1941, that the *Ramb I* was acting as a commerce raider, one might have guessed the result, for this is exactly the kind of warfare in which Mussolini's countrymen would not distinguish themselves.

The *Ramb I* we have seen to be well-designed and thought-out. And now she was well-armed with 4.7-inch guns on the fo'c'sle and poop. With her high-powered oil-motors and good speed she was an excellent modern vessel for decoy work. She proceeded out of the Mediterranean, down the coast of Africa to the Indian Ocean, where so many raiders have hoped to amass success. But one day in this sea H.M.S. *Leander* (Captain R. H. Bevan, R.N.), belonging to the New Zealand Squadron, a 7100-ton cruiser similar to the *Achilles* which fought the *Admiral Graf Spee*, intercepted the Italian, who was flying the British Red Ensign.

Leander ordered her to stop, when she lowered false colours, hoisted the Italian ensign, and opened fire with guns mounted on fo'c'sle and poop. But such a display of pugnacity was short-lived, and the Italians had the sense not to waste time. The *Leander* at once replied and concentrated five salvos, which had an immediate effect, for the *Ramb I* immediately struck her flag. One of the shortest naval engagements on record and an ignominious ending to one who pretended to be a raider.

The *Ramb I* became a terrible conflagration and you can imagine that a surface-raider of her nationality would certainly no longer give the impression of quiet discipline. Fifty minutes later the hull, which had been built with so much care, sank into the depths, whilst *Leander* picked up 11 officers and 89 men, who became our prisoners-of-war.

And the *Leander*?

She received neither damage to herself nor casualties to her ship's company.

One of the surprises of Japan's entry into the naval war has been to immediate follow up of surface-raiding. One had expected that persistent attack on our commerce by converted merchant ships would have been one of the first sequels after the sensational assault on the American Navy.

For the Japanese Mercantile Marine has constantly shown itself for years

to be progressive in the sense of keeping up to date in speed and tonnage. Their nature is clannish in the sense that whatever they do must be strictly for their own benefit as a nation, and no one else matters. When in the last war, for instance, we wanted assistance against U-boats in the Mediterranean, they were quite willing to send some divisions of their destroyers, but only on condition that they served under their own flag-officer and not ours. International co-operation is something which the Japanese do not understand. Their underselling us with an influx of cheap goods into India when we were too busy with other matters; the further flooding of British home markets with articles manufactured in Japan at cut prices—these had one objective: to pay for an increasing Navy and Mercantile Marine.

But if the Japanese is rather a copyist than an originator—he has been an astute follower in marine matters. His commercial shipping has been directed with remarkable foresight that would amaze us did we forget that all these advances in trade were part of the larger aim to rule the whole of the East. For instance, anyone who has watched the impressive departure from Marseilles of a great Japanese liner, knowing that she will reach Kobe via Suez in 32 days; or calls to mind that New York to Yokohama via Panama is only a 24-days voyage, remembers also that Japanese liners have been coming for years to Bombay, Australia, and even Africa. They employ ships of 10,000 tons capacity driven by diesel engines, but built in Japan and of 18 knots speed.

There is also a better class of Japanese merchant ships carrying chiefly cargo but with passenger accommodation limited to six large staterooms. The remarkable fact is that these diesel-engined ships have a speed of 21½ knots.

But since the year 1936, when it had become apparent that Britain would be soon locked in a war with Germany and the turn to strike in the Orient would be Japan's, the latter country began to build a large part of their mercantile tonnage as naval auxiliaries with diesel engines driving them at 16–19 knots. Internally these Japanese cargo units would require very little alteration to be fitted with guns and torpedo-tubes, and their economical use of oil-engines with the squat oval funnel gives such a big radius of action that the Japanese have a fleet of potential surface-raiders always ready.

And we must remember that their Government have kept up with this progress by giving such ships a subsidy that increases with every knot of speed. That explains why such a large number of fast-transport was immediately at hand when they contemplated invading Australia; an endurance of 20,000 to 30,000 miles being contemplated.

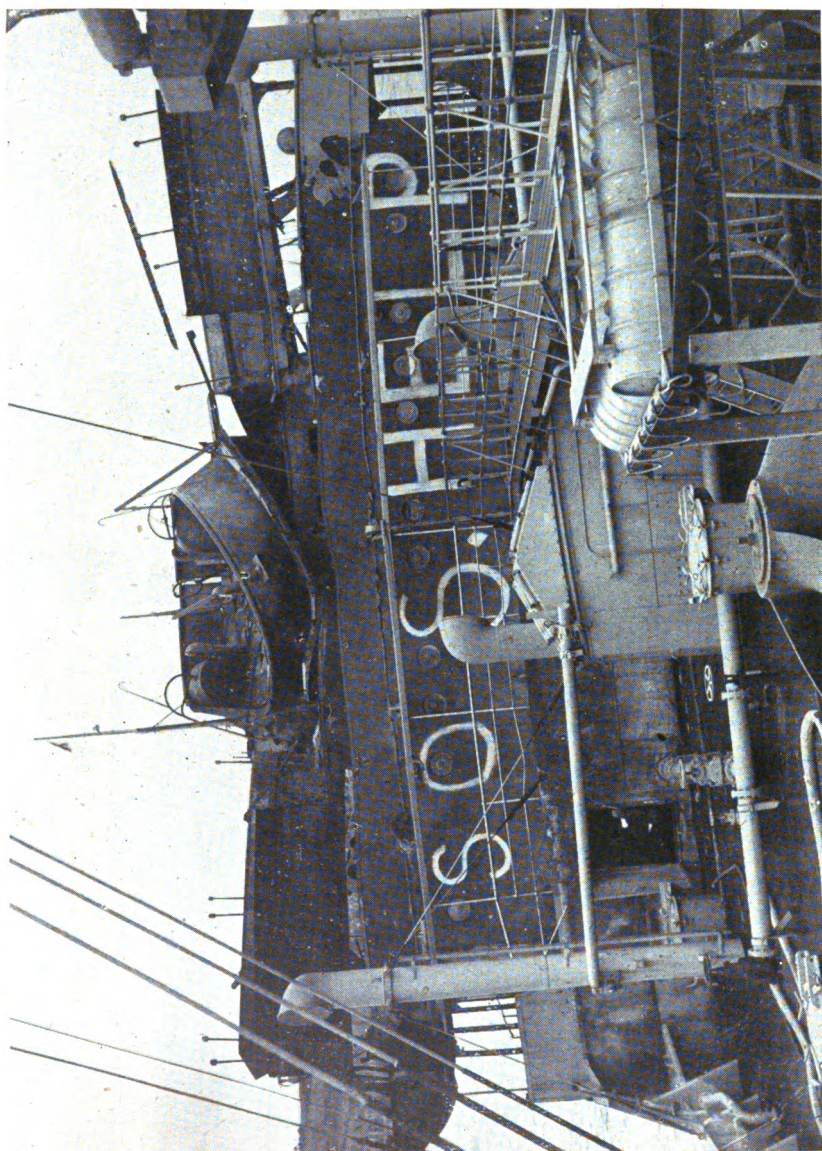
Perhaps the most notable Japanese merchant ships holding out expectation of becoming at the first opportunity troop transports, armed cruisers, raiders, are that class of 7390 tons measuring 462 ft. long and 62 ft. beam; such as the *Akagi Maru*, *Asaka Maru*, *Awata Maru*, and the *Azuma Maru*. These diesel ships, able to make their 15½ to 17 knots, can carry 1000 tons of oil.

And we must not forget that Japan was the first country to build fast tankers under the subsidy scheme. Indeed, what with the oil-age providing a nation with quite a considerable fleet of armed raiders, and the use and range of aeroplanes being vastly increased every year, the whole art of naval warfare threatened to be transformed.



THE S.S. *SAN DEMETRIO*

After the great fire. The Chief Engineer's cabin is shown on the port side aft with the cold storage underneath.



COMING ACROSS THE OCEAN

Still in a state of damage and having been greatly injured by conflagration, she has conspicuously called "SOS, Help!", but still carried on to safety. Fire has done its worst.

CHAPTER XV

THE DANGER LIMIT

EVERYONE thought that in some way or another there could never be against us an adversary bereft of humanity, but how few of us realize all the suffering which arises directly or indirectly out of the sinking of ships by German raiders! It was on June 22, 1940, that the S.S. *King City* set out from England on her voyage, but exactly two months later she had the misfortune to encounter a raider who sank her. Like the *Admiral Graf Spee* and certain others, the raider was attended by a vessel which acted as prison ship for her captives. This was one of the special lessons learnt by the Germans from raiding in the last war: the greater had been the raider's success, the more encumbered did she become with crews and passengers accumulated. In this second war, however, when conditions decreased the number of passengers till there were few people travelling other than the ship's officers and crew, these prison ships had for inmates only seafarers.

Now after the raider had set the *King City* on fire, the latter's Second Officer, Mr. T. H. Gaskarth, of Middlesborough, had the misfortune to be in his cabin, and there he seemed to be trapped, destined to sink with the ship. But a couple of seamen, anxious to save his life, tried the impossible task of dragging him through a scuttle. Already four of the ship's apprentices had been killed and the cook severely injured by the raider's shells. The survivors were taken aboard the raider, where the cook died. Mr. Gaskarth, severely damaged as he also was, displayed the coolness of a brave seaman. His leg, hanging by a tendon, might be bad enough, yet he would not allow that to make him lose hope of life. With remarkable plucky resource he made a tourniquet out of a piece of rope and what was left of his pyjamas. It was decided to amputate that leg, and 18 days after the operation he was able to get about again. Such progress did he make that by August 1941 the enemy decided that as a captive he was no longer useful and released him, so that month found him back in England.

I think even German sailors sometimes were amazed at the way a British seafarer would stand up against brutal bullying. A well-known ship called the *Sussex* was wont to run between England and New Zealand under Captain Peter Clarke, D.S.C.—he had won his decoration during the last war; one of the heroes of the Zeebrugge affair. The *Sussex* was what is known as a New Zealand refrigerator of 11,063 gross tons, 6516 tons nett, measuring 532 feet long by 70 feet beam. Designed for the carriage of Empire food to England, she could do 17 knots with her diesel engines, all her auxiliary engines being electric. She had three decks and six holds.

Now the heavily laden *Sussex* had come via the Cape of Good Hope. She carried one anti-submarine gun plus one anti-aircraft. Sandbags protected the hatches, while on the bridge an armour-plated pill-box contained the steering-wheel and was connected with the principal parts of the ship by telephone.

In the 'tween-decks she carried in steel cylinders many tons of explosives. But one morning off the Irish coast at dawn there flew overhead an aircraft. It proceeded to give the recognition signals like ours and all seemed well,

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but then the aeroplane descended towards the *Sussex*. Captain Clarke rang down a warning and tin-hatted gunners stood to their guns.

It turned out that this aeroplane was a Stuka, which went into a vertical dive and began firing with its machine-guns.

"Open fire!" ordered Captain Clarke.

But the first salvo missed the target and down fell a couple of German bombs. Unfortunately one bomb dropped down a funnel and this funnel smashed down on deck as the second bomb hit the ship aft, accompanied by a terrific explosion.

This was by no means the only occasion when a Nazi bomber had made such a perfect aim as to send a bomb down a ship's funnel. Precisely the same thing had happened earlier in the war off the French coast. And today as the goggled airman, exceedingly pleased with himself and his devastation, surveyed the fire now raging in the ship, he essayed to make a second attack, but at that moment the *Sussex's* gunners gave him such a hot reception that he deemed it more advisable to speed off.

In the ship was serving as seaman gunner an eighteen-year-old youngster named Croxford. He had been badly wounded by machine-gun bullets and severely burnt by an exploding bomb. The Captain ordered the suffering fellow down below, but the latter was too keen a warrior to obey. Was it not young Croxford whose barrage had driven away the Stuka at the second attack?

But then an assistant steward named Fred Trundley took his turn, and clambered forward with a hose, fighting the fire all the morning. About now the first of those explosive containers blew up, but, scorched and blackened, Trundley still went on risking his life, and whilst no more explosions followed, still there were fires which hissed out of the Australian wool that made up so much of the cargo. Then by evening, after twelve hours' bitter battle with the flames, the fierce conflagration of a fine ship was at last under control.

By this time the *Sussex* was little better than a floating wreck, with her wireless gone, compasses and chronometers smashed, everything on the bridge broken up, chart-room utterly ruined. She was a sad sight for all who had been proud of their ship. As they gazed aft, they looked at the gaping black hole where a bomb had burst and the fire had raged. Instead of well-kept decks was the untidy picture of filthy water, of charred wood. There was only a boat's compass by which to steer, but the ship's diesel engines, happily, had been undamaged.

One thing after another! It had been an anxious time early since morn, but when the stars should have illumined the night and made navigation easier, a heavy fog settled down. . . .

Cr-r-r-rash! Wallop! Bump!

There had been a collision with a British trawler, and this seemed to complete the imperfect day. At last a British patrol vessel burst through the fog and guided into port the motor-ship that once was a sailor's pride.

The greatest pride of all was that, despite the sea-raiders and U-boats and aeroplanes, she had carried her cargo from New Zealand to Great Britain.

When, after an interval of some months, surface-raiding was resumed in May 1940 with a vessel of the *Altmark* type called the *Narvik*, it was reckoned that either *Narvik* or a sister ship was the one who laid

mines off Cape Agulhas (South Africa) and in the Bass Straits (between Tasmania and Australia); it was only following the example in the past war when Captain Nерger in the raider *Wolf* carried 500 mines which were laid (1) near the Cape of Good Hope, (2) off Bombay and Colombo, and also (3) off the Cook Strait, New Zealand.

Nерger's cruise which occurred just before the end of that war assuredly was a fine achievement, and there are so many instances in this second war where raiders have done identical deeds in the same places that it is fair to assume Nazi Germany studied these voyages of the past raiders with more than casual interest.

But in telling of surface-raiders of 1939 and subsequent years we find so frequently there is the accompaniment of physical pain that was generally absent during hostilities of 1914-18. Consider the liner which was attacked by a German surface-raider in the Atlantic some twelve hundred miles from land. The enemy first stopped, then started shelling with such vehemence that the steamer's gun and wireless aerial were soon shot away, and then the Captain decided to make a run for it. This so roused the wrath of the raider that he punished the steamer worse than ever.

His fire was so deadly accurate that many of the passengers—women as well as men—were killed outright, and finally the German gave the rest five minutes to take to the boats and shove off before the ship went down. These craft were in no fit condition for ocean rowing, having already been made useless with shell holes.

The date was January 1941, and twelve of the men passengers crowded themselves on to a raft no more spacious than a hearthrug. One of these was Second Lieutenant R. E. G. Cox, aged 24, of the Indian Army. He had come to his home in England on sick leave. A big lusty fellow weighing 13 stone, he was now restored to health and going back to rejoin his regiment, but he had also to experience hardships of the sea. The frail raft capsized them all again and again, the sun blistered their skin and the salt air tantalized them; without food or drink, for five and a half days they were stalked by man-eating sharks. Gradually one by one they fell victims to these sharks until of the twelve passengers there remained but three. Sometimes they found themselves once more on the raft, having managed to get back before sharks could devour them. One man, strapped to the side in a lifejacket, was washed clean away, and another who swam after him was killed by a big fish.

It was the lack of sustenance which had begun to lessen their numbers. Then one day this lonely trio sighted a Spanish ship and with great consideration they were lifted on board in slings. One man had already become in a bad way, his legs having been bitten almost off by a shark. Now as the Spanish ship proceeded, she came across a boatload of survivors from their sunken vessel numbering over forty, and brought them to Teneriffe. Other survivors spent 23 days in an open boat, yet reached Montevideo, where we mentioned that the *Admiral Graf Spee* ended her hectic career. But when those others were landed in the Spanish ship at Teneriffe there was plenty to do with these unfortunate men. Mr. Cox, for instance, had become so thin that instead of 13 stone he had shrunk to a weight of six stone three pounds. In fact, so blistered and weak had he become that at first there seemed no medical hope of saving his life. But at Teneriffe they were all placed in charge of a famous Spanish physician, who saved the whole

crowd, including that man suffering from gangrene after the shark had almost robbed him of his legs.

It was also true that a surface-raider, in shelling a British steamer commanded by Captain A. M. Caird in 1941, did terrible damage, wrecking the steering-gear and gun. Salvo after salvo hit the steamer till finally Captain Caird signalled that he was abandoning ship. Although the Nazi acknowledged the message, the firing still continued, and this Master began to collect his people for departure. He found his Chief Officer badly wounded and carried him down the ladders from the wheelhouse to the main deck, then went back to look for another man. The enemy thereupon opened fire with machine-guns.

It was typical of the Nazi mind that, although two boats had been got away, the raider shot others to pieces, so that survivors who were left on board launched two rafts just before their vessel sank, and although they spent 18 hours in the rough sea were eventually picked up; which was a lucky happening when so many of these raided mariners perished on the high seas.

On such occasions the pluck and resource of the British mercantile officer stand out conspicuously. Take the case of Mr. Edward Wallace Dingle, a Northumbrian. The ship in which he had been serving as Second Officer had been attacked by a raider and abandoned, but he went off in charge of a lifeboat which contained 26 other officers and men. It was night-time and the raider continued in the vicinity. He kept sweeping the sea with his searchlight, evidently hoping to gather up some British prisoners, but Dingle discussed the matter with his shipmates and they all promised to stand by him loyally. Hiding in the bottom of the boat to avoid the rays, these men finally got away from the German's sight and escaped across the ocean in a voyage of about a thousand miles.

Once again this escape trip was a meagre affair, their only food and drink being 24 tins of condensed milk, 15 gallons of water, and some biscuits. Yet it was Mr. Dingle, who by his enterprise, not only from falling into the enemy's hands but from the destiny of death, saved his friends and was awarded the M.B.E.

I have mentioned the loss of so many vessels because when magnified still more it gives some idea of the manner in which our shipping losses were occurring, notwithstanding all the efforts made to convoy and escort these vessels. By the spring of 1942 the British public were getting anxious that our launching of ships by no means mounted with the losses; but those in a position to know the true state of things realized at the beginning of 1941 that our sinkings were in excess of our yards' building capacity.

The only thing was to lay aside ordinary practice and adopt abnormal measures. Not otherwise would it be possible even slightly to close the gap which existed between tonnage and replacement. How then was this deficiency to be met? It seemed strange that we should have to admit such an unpleasant fact when only a few years ago building yards had to be closed for lack of work, shipbuilders dismissed, and even the ablest officers in the Merchant Navy were tramping the busy ports looking for jobs.

So the first call was for every shipyard to have every slip full; to reopen derelict yards; to fabricate sections of standardized vessels at inland steel works and assemble them later. The United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa, India, all helped, and the call went out for urgent production.

Merchant ships were to be built on the ground in sections and hoisted into position, powerful cranes hauling the sections for final assembly. Riveting was too meticulous and time-wasting, so welding took its place.

Such methods helped to save time by standardization of materials and production, but we had certain interesting and alarming facts left over from the last war to warn and make us ponder. When Admiral W. S. Sims first reached this country from America in 1917, Sir John Jellicoe told him quite frankly as First Sea Lord that the German submarines were winning the war, that unless some unforeseen development took place our losing the war was a certainty, for we were losing a million tons of shipping each month and also laying aside for repairs a considerable amount of injured tonnage. As against those figures, we could not build sufficient tonnage per year.

But just as much tonnage was diverted by going to the East and Antipodes, not by Suez Canal but via South Africa—so it has been in the present war; history has again been repeating itself, the same anxieties have re-asserted themselves, but today we are better organized for rebuilding of ships as for remaking them ready for sea after grievous damage. It is unfortunately true that German explosives are much more powerful than they were 25 years ago, whether mine, bomb, or torpedo be used. On the other hand the ship repair yards have been able to achieve the most difficult jobs and restore vessels to the carrying trade as, for instance, cutting a ship in halves, rebuilding and rejoining her like new; restoring tankers after being twisted out of shape through striking mines; getting a refrigerating ship again fit for service after blazing for a week; rebuilding a vessel in the spring after having failed to get her afloat from the shore all winter.

Of course, during the last war some great feats of diving and salvage were achieved round our coasts. Sometimes months intervened before the vessel was again fit for service, but that was better than losing the steamer entirely. In the present hostilities a certain vessel of 7000 tons deadweight was torpedoed 30 miles from land. Fortunately she had a cargo which oftentimes in the last war saved the ship from foundering altogether, although I recollect one case when it caused the steamer to draw so much water aft that we just managed to get her into harbour, where she touched bottom at low tide.

Well, the 7000-ton ship had a hole 60 feet by 30 feet in the stern—rather an unusual place for a torpedo to enter—and this stern was completely submerged. In this condition she was drawing 38 feet aft and was too deep for entering port; so they towed her to a suitable shore and beached her on a sandy bottom. The first task then was to make watertight so many of the stern compartments as possible. The weather was not too good, yet the divers stuck to their difficult job and completed it. Having performed so much, the water was then pumped out, cargo discharged, and the ship moved into a wet dock, where the remainder of the timber was taken out and a patch put over the hole. Next, the once-damaged ship was repaired completely and once again 7000 tons of carrying capacity saved for the nation. In a similar manner after a 16,000-ton ship had broken her back, the experts got to work and independently salvaged the halves, to be joined up again.

It is remarkable that notwithstanding the numerous losses and injuries to our shipping by commerce raiders, submarines' torpedoes and aeroplanes'

bombs, or mines, together with the marine risks of bad weather, collision, and the like; ships and cargoes from the beginning of war to the end of 1940 were salvaged to the extent of £22 millions. Of these figures £10 millions represented foodstuffs, munitions, metals, etc. But £12 millions represented the pre-war value of the ships. It must be remembered that in the design and handling of special pneumatic tools tremendous improvements have taken place between the two wars, and other tools have been invented since this war began. The net result is that from September 1939 until March 1941 over a million tons of damaged vessels were returned to service.

In the whole of the last war we lost from 12 to 13 million gross tons of ships. Both in the last and the present war the amount of tonnage claimed to have been sunk by any U-boat must never be taken as an accurate statement when it originates from Germany; for lying deliberately is part of their propaganda. For instance, when Goebbels claimed that in February 1941 the Germans had that month sunk 740,000 tons, those figures after being checked by the British Admiralty were found to be 140,000. Thus Goebbels multiplied the truthful amount by five, which made it look more impressive.

Much ingenuity has been done in connection with this salvage work, as, for instance, when a ship is too far gone, and in that case valuable metal has been cut off, cast into the furnace and smelted to make new parts. Sometimes, too, if the bows of one ship are too seriously damaged, but the stern and 'midships are in good condition, it may be that the hull is amalgamated with that of a second vessel and a new ship produced out of two injured ones. British shipbuilders have even fashioned an 8000-tons tanker out of the salvaged parts from two tankers that could never go to sea again.

CHAPTER XVI

LOOKING FOR LAND

ONE ship during her voyage in 1941 was shelled by two raiders for 40 minutes. The result was that she was just a shattered wreck with her lifeboats smashed too; but the Chief Officer (John Macgregor) having done all he could for ship and crew became laid out—his leg was smashed, probably by the blast from a shell.

He was a plucky fellow, who made light of his ills; the ship, like her boats, was 'thoroughly done in' and now the Captain, with the aid of some others of the crew, picked Macgregor up and insisted on throwing him over the ship's side. It sounds a cruel thing to do, yet it was very wise and unselfish, otherwise Macgregor would have gone down with the ship; but as it was, he found the sea swarming with sharks. He discovered a raft quite near and managed to crawl aboard, though this soon became overcrowded.

And all the time the gentle Germans were machine-gunning everyone else. Somehow one of the stewards gave him a mouthful of brandy, and it helped to alleviate his pain. "I haven't signed a chit for this one," he

joked, but it was difficult to forget that horrible pain. The discomfort worried him too, for though his body was immersed in the sea, it made his wounds sting all the more. Alternately scorched by the sun and exposed to the cold, he managed to keep hold of life and had the rare fortune of being picked up, so the scene ends with his arrival home in Edinburgh. There they amputated his leg, but ten wounds did he suffer from pieces of German shell.

Now one of the best yarns of these open boats centres round Mr. Sydney Light who, before the war, was owner of a small motor-cruising yacht chiefly used for week-end fishing. Light was one of those people born for ships and the sea; indeed the story begins in 1940 with him serving as A.B. in a ship that received a torpedo in her starboard side. That which he now took charge of was No. 4 lifeboat, but as their ship had gone down in the Atlantic leaving them to make the best of a bad job in heavy seas with the wind at S.W. force 8, it was hardly what anyone could term 'jolly boating weather'.

But the hero of this story was a man accustomed to touching life at many points. Apart from handling yachts in the summer, riding his own hunters in winter, he was also an expert skier. A man of resource, Mr. Sydney Herbert Light was one of those fellows born for adventure, and it is impossible to imagine an incident matching the individual so perfectly.

When his ship was struck by the torpedo he was standing on the main deck, and immediately he reported for orders to Mr. Craze, the Third Mate, who happened to be officer-of-the-watch. Light was instructed to call all hands on deck and abandon the ship. The submarine had hurled his dart whilst it was still during dark. No. 4 boat was swung out on the davits and as she was being lowered, a very heavy sea raised up her stern, unhooking the after fall, then another sea also lifted and swamped her though she managed to receive several nasty bumps against the ship's side.

However, she was able to receive on board her assigned survivors, but the bumping threatened to become serious, so Light decided to allow her to drift away from the sinking hull, and proposed getting out oars, then rowing to the lee side, picked up some more men. There was such a heavy sea running this night that it could not be done, and the crowd of ten men in the boat were trying to keep the latter head to sea, though ineffectually. Light then ordered the men to bail out the accumulated water, as it was now up to the thwarts, swishing about and making her an awkward creature to be handled. She insisted on lying broadside-on to the waves as they kept breaking over the port side and rolling across to dash out of the starboard side.

On to this sickening sight of damp desolation there suddenly shone a searchlight from the submarine that had torpedoed them. Further complications to follow? More brutality? But that danger passed, the lifeboat, full of men and sea-water, was so low in the waves that fortunately the enemy could not descry them. On the second day wind and sea had abated considerably, so they began to respond by ridding her of loose water, squaring up things in the daylight, shipping the mast and setting sail.

About 11 a.m. they came across a similar boat, but these men were survivors from another torpedoed vessel. The stranger had seen the other in the distance but being in much the same plight was advised to steer S.E. by compass. Then, having been given some cigarettes, the new boat

proceeded and the two separated. The hope was not yet dead that some other vessel might come along this part of the Atlantic, so Light's boat was hanging about and waiting, and at 1 p.m. a couple of steamships were sighted but it was disappointing that the steamers never saw No. 4 lifeboat. Afterwards Light and his companions decided in conference that they had best delay no longer but get on their course. And this was done eagerly.

With a gentle N.E. wind, heavy swell, the S.E. course was steered, but soon the breeze freshened and veered to W. Men complained of feeling cold, so they all did physical jerks and restored circulation. The sea was getting up with breaking crests and about 5 p.m. they sighted another lifeboat but could not make contact although Light's craft lowered mainsail, running under jib for the present. After the stranger disappeared to the south, No. 4 boat reset the mainsail until at 7 p.m. they lay to with the sea anchor ahead and covered themselves from spray by means of the boat-cover. Throughout the night a lookout was kept, but daylight came without anything to report except that rain squalls kept on till 5 a.m., when wind and rain moderated.

On the third day they got under way at 7.30 a.m., under one-reefed mainsail and jib. Previously they breakfasted each off one biscuit, one bit of corned mutton, washed down by some condensed milk and a dipper of water. By 9.30 the weather conditions eased, the wind blew steadily and by shaking out the reef they kept up a speed estimated at three and a half knots. And at 11 a.m. they sighted a flying-boat coming from the north, distant about 15 miles and heading to the eastward.

Excepting Mr. Clay, the chief electrician, who suffered pain in his legs, they were a boatload of happy people and wonderfully well considering their cramped quarters. They made Mr. Clay as comfortable as possible. They continued in good spirits, although disappointed that the flying-boat never came back again. Again these voyagers took things easily for the night and the fourth day saw them once more with jib and mainsail set at 7.30 a.m., but the wind now came north. Unfortunately none of them knew what the ship's position was when torpedoed, but ever since setting canvas they had done about 500 miles.

Meanwhile wind and sea freshened very much, but they held on to all sail. It was Mr. Clay whose health was giving them some anxiety, and today he came out of his position forward looking pale and weak but bright in spirits. Light certainly showed good leadership in looking after everyone, preventing any discouragement, making them all content with their lot and hopeful. Then they had community singing and physical jerks to preserve the maximum fitness. Every man of them had become soaking wet on quitting their doomed steamer and their clothes were still damp.

There was a fellow named Rolph who was the Captain's steward. At present he happened to be at the tiller, and as he glanced across the waves he chanced to see another lifeboat. She seemed to have neither oars nor sails, in fact, she showed no sign of life beyond a canvas tent fitted amidships. No. 4 therefore altered course to the north and when the two craft were near to each other all hands shouted together with gusto. There came a slight movement in the canvas tent whence out came the Chief Officer of another ship that also had been torpedoed. Throwing the Chief Officer a rope, which was made fast, No. 4 took them in tow at 4.30 p.m. and so they continued thus till seven o'clock, towing 16 men to the S.E., but when

sails were downed at the usual time and the sea-anchor let go ahead, the weather gave the usual break at this time of the day.

Wind and sea became boisterous, heavy rain began to fall, and very soon they had shipped quite a lot of water; in fact, Light and the second steward bailed out 26 bucketfuls during the dark hours, so that with the return of another day all hands were still wet and very stiff. Light again persuaded them to do physical jerks when they got under way, and there is no need to remind ourselves that this forethought conserved their health, which was being so much tried. Light agreed with the Chief Officer, their new ocean friend, to steer S.E. by E., but the speed was lessened by at least a knot through towing that lifeboat with the 16 men.

Someone gazed ahead. "What's that? . . . It looks very like land."

The time was 5.30 p.m., but they still kept going for another hour and a half. But having regard to the fact that the coast was not known to them, and that it was dotted with rocks as well as shoals, some caution was advisable. Some of the men in the other boat had been injured when torpedoed and most were without lifebelts. It would never do for this stranger to attempt to get ashore, capsize, and hurl the 16 men into the water, so they both lay all night to the sea-anchor, but before darkness came it was arranged to maintain one look-out in each boat till dawn. Light also handed the stranger two tins of corned mutton, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of tobacco, cigarette papers, and matches.

On the sixth day of the voyage Light woke to find wind and sea had gone down to nothing. Only a big land swell could be felt. After consultation between the two boats it was decided in the absence of any wind to row in the same direction, S.E., as they had been sailing. Light's craft had left the ship with eight oars, but in getting away they had lost one. He therefore now gave the other boat four with which to row and kept three for themselves. It was a slow, wearisome job and though vessels were still passing not one seemed to take any notice. Thus, tired out with what looked useless exertion, the men in No. 4 were glad at 4 p.m. to cease work and turn in for the night under the stretched boat-cover.

Sydney Light was more than a good fellow and a good seaman: he was the good Samaritan always ready to render a shipmate some act of kindness. The seventh day brought with it a gentle N.W. breeze, and when the Chief Officer from that other boat came aboard to announce that his sunken vessel was named the *St. Malo*, belonging to the Canadian Government; he wished to give the news that two of his men had bad feet such as we call 'trench' feet. Off went Light to see what he could do, and this is what he achieved:

The first thing that he did on going aboard the *St. Malo* boat was to massage the two men, then he gave them his own sea-boot stockings; next he dressed the thigh wounds of the Chief Steward, Mr. Lane. He tended the injuries of another man, as well as the ankle of that ship's carpenter, then he returned to his own boat; and it was unanimously agreed that they should sail all night of this seventh day. At midnight the deck-boy, Pyner, complained of terrific pains in his feet, but again Light tried massage, won back the circulation, tore a blanket into strips and so bound up the boy's feet with good effect. On the eighth day it was the galley boy's turn to complain of trench feet, so massage was applied to give him relief likewise.

Light's duties both as seaman and amateur physician were never-ending. The absence of wind again made them out sweeps till the wind freshened

at 10 a.m. Then Light ingeniously fitted a jib to an oar and so turned it into a mizzen for the boat. He also cut up the boat-cover to fashion a foresail. Certainly they were not making as much progress as they wished; course was altered due E., they picked up the land and at 2 p.m. the wind came S.W. so they continued to sail all night. A bearing of the North Star was taken and it was found to be about N.N.E.

When next day light breeze came up, it was southerly, but at 3 p.m. wind and sea had increased violently. This towing practice was still somewhat of a drawback and it became decided to transfer some of the men, provisions, and water from the Canadian craft. This improved matters, and better headway could be assured. The wind went round to S.E. now, the mainsail had to be double-reefed and heavy rain poured down. The watches had to be altered slightly with the addition of some new hands, but the physical jerks and arrangement as to food went on just the same. Ten days had passed, no attempt had been made to cross to the other side of the Atlantic, only to hug the African coast. At dawn on the eleventh day the wind was blowing gently from the S.E. At 7.15 a.m. British Summer Time they sighted what was undoubtedly another vessel and lit a flare to attract her, but no answer followed.

Five minutes later a second flare was lit . . . yes, after a slight suspense there was a reply, undoubtedly. It seemed marvellous that at length they had been seen. How lucky they had been after all this time!

Light summoned to full consciousness every man in the boat and they cleared away the tent and then began rowing towards the sighted ship.

Out sweeps!

There was a nasty, choppy sea running, but the steamer waited for them, and round they went to the port side. It was a fortunate end to their adventures for they all managed to climb the vessel's steep side; and about 8 a.m. they set out on a fresh voyage but reached home safely.

Sydney Light had won high praise for his fine work and proved himself deserving of something better than A.B. He was decorated by the King with the G.M. and then went to sea in another ship, but this time as First Officer.

CHAPTER XVII

SHE WENT TO SEA

NEVER did human people entrust themselves to ships of the sea with greater uncertainty of their fate than during these war years, and with the Nazis as uncivilized enemies neither sex won tolerance, but equally men and women shared the brutalities of harsh treatment.

A Miss Joan Fieldgate was living with her parents at West Drayton, Middlesex, in 1940, when she volunteered to escort some evacuated children to Australia. This was an act of brave unselfishness in those days, and the undertaking was accomplished all right, and in due time Miss Fieldgate started back in a vessel bound for England. But on her return voyage

homeward she had the misfortune to be torpedoed, only to be picked up by a Nazi raider. Had we been at war with any other country (except the pagan Japanese) one need not have felt any anxiety for her fate; but after being taken to Germany she was placed in an internment camp. From there she was transferred to a hospital at Ravensburg in southern Germany where she died in October 1941.

One perceives how that women quite rightly might be discouraged from ocean travel as the war grew more intolerable. A steamer early in 1941 left Cape Town bound for England, but on April 22, when only six days from Sierra Leone, was sunk by a U-boat's torpedo. That locality even in the last war became the cruising area for some of the bigger U-boats, but already Nazi submarines in the present hostilities had developed an Atlantic ambition. For they could be sure of lying in wait for much British shipping coming up that ocean.

After the lifeboats had been launched and started on their respective voyage, it was found that one boat contained Mrs. Haldane, a 30-year-old widow who resided in Markinch, Fife; Miss Kathleen Peto, of Leyland Vicarage, near Preston, Lancs; and Miss Violet Camber, of Telscombe Cliffs, Newhaven, Sussex. But besides these three in the craft were fourteen of the crew, of whom were seven Chinamen. The navigator of this outfit was a Welsh seaman named Taffy Owen, and his reliance was on a pocket compass.

They had 600 miles to do before reaching Cape Verde Islands, that group of uninviting and mountainous rocks which belong to the Portuguese and lie very many miles out in the Atlantic, some 320 miles west of Africa's Cape Verde. Of course, from where the ship was sunk to this locality they could make good use of the N.E. trade winds, and they covered the 600 miles in the somewhat slow time of 14 days. There was no lack of food, for they possessed a case of butter which had been salvaged, they also had ship's biscuits, so buttered biscuits and condensed milk, if monotonous fare, prevented starvation, though they were short of water and were restricted to one mouthful of that daily; but on the tenth day out this boatload had to give up talking because their lips became cracked and their throats parched.

Some rainwater from the skies assisted their other supplies, consisting of two jars filled; but such was the amount of personal vanity in this boat that Miss Peto, who possessed the only mirror and comb, had continually to pass these things round for the others' use. More than once the boat was almost swamped and they were compelled to bail furiously. In that terrific heat which came on the sea from the Sahara their faces became cracked and bleeding, but the medicine chest provided them with ointment.

Altogether a fortnight's strange life among mixed companions. In the morning they would cheer up each other by singing hymns in which, of course, Taffy led, but they would also pass the time by telling out their individual life-stories.

Tired out? Exhausted? When they actually sighted the Verdes on their fourteenth day they could not even cheer the Portuguese police who carried them ashore. Nevertheless, in time they recovered, and a ship landed them at Gibraltar. But recollection of their experience was so vivid that they remembered seeing the submarine after the sinking.

Quite different was the experience of Miss Victoria Alexandrina

Drummond, a member of an old Scottish family and the only woman to hold the Board of Trade certificate as a qualified marine engineer. Ever since the beginning of war Miss Drummond served as Second Engineer in cargo ships. A woman without nerves, she was god-daughter of Queen Victoria and grand-daughter of the first Lord Amherst of Hackney. In the last war she was serving at an engineering shop in Dundee. Her Second Engineer's certificate dates from 1924, and when this second war with Germany broke forth she threw up her job in London to go once more to sea. We even find her taking part in the Dunkirk evacuation.

One day, in 1941, her ship was coming from the Bristol Channel outward bound for the United States when a Nazi aeroplane made a daring attack and intermittently swept the deck with machine-gun fire. Miss Drummond was off duty at the time but at once went below into the engine-room and took control. The enemy bomber went roaring backwards and forwards overhead, the distance at the time being about 400 miles from land.

The first German salvo threw Miss Drummond against the levers on the control platform in the engine-room and nearly stunned her. When the stokehold and engine-room staff had done all they could to coax an extra knot or two out of the ship, she ordered them above, but she stayed behind though she had little hope of escape. For the main injection pipe just above her head started a joint, and scalding steam rushed out. This very necessary pipe she nursed through the explosion of each salvo, easing down when the sound of an aircraft told her that bombs were about to fall, but afterwards she would increase steam. With one hand she held down the throttle control and stood alone in the engine-room. Admittedly the lady was not looking her best, for a wide black streak of fuel oil from a strained pipe trickled down her face and closed one eye.

But she 'stuck it' to the end, and all the time her bravery was being watched by one of the officers looking through a skylight. This is an unusual real-life story, but her devotion to duty prevented more serious damage, and her conduct inspired the whole ship's company. She carried on aboard this vessel till the voyage ended, and afterwards made many other voyages.

Of the pathos and suffering, the cruel fate and pluck of so many women regardless of nationality, this war affords innumerable instances. There were coming across the Atlantic in the earlier part of 1941 seventeen Red Cross nurses aboard the S.S. *Maasdam*. They travelled to join the Harvard Field Hospital, but the ship *en route* was sunk by the Nazis and the passengers took to the boats. Fifteen of this number were together in one of the boats, which became damaged and capsized. Those who could swim were told to make for a near-by ship, others clung to the overturned craft and awaited rescue. When three of these nurses were swimming away, they found the lifebelts awkward and cumbersome. One woman, in fact, was fast becoming exhausted by the heavy waves when a British fellow passenger supported her in time and thus they were picked up from drowning. It was another ship which was able to stand by and pick these fifteen up, though not without difficulty. The Captain and crew of that rescuing vessel did everything for their comfort, yielding up their own cabins to these nurses. The latter had left the *Maasdam* in their white uniforms which, of course, immediately got heavy and soaked. Some of them were bringing across the Atlantic pretty frocks, and they lost everything except the clothes they were wearing, their money, and passports. But the officers in the

rescuing ship gave them sweaters and jerseys, which were rather a change after the immersion, but at least they were not sodden with salt water. Nurse Lilian Evans, who had come from Cambridge, Massachusetts, was in the rough sea an hour making for the ship that picked them up.

But if fifteen were saved, why not the other two? The truth is that their boat was adrift for 19 days, but, as in the Dunkirk evacuation where British and French nurses vied with each other as they saved the lives of British soldiers just out of hospital, so today these Harvard nurses bound for England took pity on the sailors in this open boat, tore up some rags and bound their frost-bitten feet. These two American women were aged respectively 27 and 26. Their companions in the lifeboat numbered five Norwegian and two British seamen. You can well imagine that after *Maasdam* was torpedoed they endured 19 days of not merely sheer discomfort but of hunger and thirst. All that the party daily had to eat were dried biscuits; all they had to drink were two ounces of water. This barely kept them alive.

Some of the men became affected by gangrene, and two of the Britons died from exposure. Finally it was a destroyer which came along, took on board and landed the nurses at a port in the North of Ireland. So much had these two suffered from thirst and fatigue that some time elapsed ere they could even speak.

In an earlier volume* dealing with our ships during the last war I ventured to relate a number of incidents attributed as direct answers to prayer. I have since received letters from seamen who, having been bereft by torpedoing of their ship, were miraculously picked up in the Atlantic from a raft and restored to safety.

Now during this second German war a British merchant ship in 1941 had not long left port to cross the Atlantic than she was bombed from the air. Luckily she was not hit, but it was a very near miss; so narrowly was the ship avoided that in disturbing the water the bomb sent up such a wave that the engine-room was flooded. But still the ship carried on and the engines continued to go round. So at length she reached mid-Atlantic. Then suddenly, without any warning, a U-boat lying in wait torpedoed her. The engine-room caught fire, flames prevented the engines from being stopped; the crew of 32 men swung out and lowered the boats. This was dangerous and none too easy, since she was still going full speed ahead.

But despite some bodily ailments, these 32 packed themselves into two lifeboats, and got well clear of the ship that would presently sink. Then the boats set a course for South America, which was reckoned to be 800 miles away. The reader already is acquainted with such a boat voyage and how it concluded by reaching the coast of Brazil. We may therefore pass over these details and concentrate on the unusual. Even after only two days' sail in the open boats the ship's cook, who had been hurt by the torpedoing, died; but two other men suffered from severe wounds, whilst some, by the thirst as we have seen in some boats, became nearly mad.

If only the clouds would open and send them rain to keep them alive!

But in that torrid heat there seemed not a hope. The sky suggested anything but rain. They would have to suffer and die.

* *Danger Zone*, 1934.

At last the Captain called his two boatloads together and addressed them.

"We're in great danger and dying of thirst. I'm going to ask you to pray for rain."

Some men smiled, others smirked; all noted the quite unusual request for their Skipper to make of them.

But in spite of their crowded quarters and extreme uneasiness, they said their prayers. Within a few hours they were answered when the first spots began to fall. Then the spots increased to a deluge, the men spread a sail over their boat, caught all the water they wanted, slaked their thirst, cooled their parched bodies. For four days and nights it rained and rained, the sky sent torrents, and they were soaked to the skin.

The sailors marvelled and rejoiced. It was their belief that a miracle indeed had happened. The two boats sailed on again. But they felt lonely and deserted in this wide ocean.

A little later the Captain again summoned the other boat for them to come together. "This time," said he, "we will pray for a ship to pick us up."

It still seemed hoping in excess of the wildest optimism. The sun was dropping below the horizon, and so were their spirits. Most of the men tried to kneel in the cramped space of the crowded, ribbed boats. Hard and uncomfortable. Still, they supported the prayer.

"God send us a ship. . . . God send us a ship. . . ."

The sun sank for that day. Night followed. At 2 a.m., whilst yet it was dark, the climax came to their troubles, the solution of all their suspense. For an American freighter saw these two craft, stopped, and the latter rowed alongside.

It was deliverance come at last, their sorrows now had become part of the past. Presently there was plenty of food and drink, there were hours of undisturbed sleep.

Life was worth living after all.

CHAPTER XVIII

ACROSS THE OCEAN

If in the last war Germany began with the surface raiders, realized that after a while they could not put their entire trust in these, then switched over to U-boats, but afterwards combined these two features, it has been very similar during these second hostilities, except that for a period this highly developed weapon the fighting 'plane has also been for a while the great enemy on the Atlantic. Occasionally the ships for raiding separate; or convoyed vessels have come back and had their burst of success; the Focke-Wulf has likewise during a comparatively short phase of time impressed itself as a deadly weapon with her devastating bombs, though her range from the land and her time in the air are limited.

But eventually German aggressiveness on sea comes back to that ugly but dependable creature called the submarine. And it is the U-boat the Nazis have again found to be the most worthy of development. Only towards the end of Germany's last submarine war were some of these boats able to go hundreds of miles down the Atlantic, molest shipping and even bring home certain portions of cargo that their country much needed. Thus, with picked commanding officers, those U-boats which were able to spend three months at sea, mounting the powerful armament of two 5'9 and two 3'4-inch guns, besides a couple of bow torpedo-tubes and some mines, were proving an elementary truth which this second war has been able to demonstrate fully, viz. the U-boat is quite capable of being a transoceanic rather than a mere coastal weapon.

Hitler has therefore resumed where the Kaiser left off, for by 1918 there were only four German submarines, *U-151*, *U-152*, *U-153* and *U-154*, which had the four-gun armament just mentioned and would voyage as far down the African coast as the Gulf of Guinea. They performed such daring attacks as one usually associated only with a well-armed surface vessel. That is to say, they bombarded a West African wireless station, shelled liners at 7000 yards' range and did pretty well as they liked until *E-35*, a smaller British submarine, torpedoed *U-154* west of Spain and sent the German to the bottom.

The Nazis certainly were well advised in the latter stages of this second war to send their U-boats out on the ocean, North Atlantic or Caribbean, rather than tying them to the Narrow seas. They were thus able to work more directly, sinking cargo ships whether in or out of convoy, and need not feel nervous of armed trawlers, Q-ships and other light craft whose duty was to patrol the shores.

It is true that the Germans made no fewer than seven submarine voyages across to the U.S.A. during the last war, of which the first cruise was during April 1918 in *U-151*. The time from Kiel to the Delaware coast was about five weeks, so we can obtain a fair idea of that shorter passage of the modern U-boats to northern Brazil and the Caribbean coast. Arrange also for a modern *U-151* to be met with barrels of oil by a supply ship or from a French island in the West Indies, and we can understand that as regards submarine warfare, this present set of hostilities are really the last in a more protracted and logical manner. The U-boats have grown to be treated as U-ships. Indeed, when *U-151* in July 1918 got back to Kiel she had voyaged for 94 days and over 10,000 miles. Is not this quite as wonderful as the trips which Hitler's U-boats have been performing since they had the run of France's ports?

Just as occurred in the last war, and the German surface raiders after that useless period of the fast ex-passenger liners developed into the *Möwe* and *Seeadler* phase, and then became very quiet only to be enlivened by such artful creatures as the *Rena* and *Greif*; so we could not be surprised by sudden flaring up of another pocket-battleship, or perhaps the most recently modified *Altmark* type of tanker.

It was thought in London during early 1942 that about half a dozen German surface raiders were using the then Vichy-controlled West Africa and especially Dakar. Sometimes tankers, sometimes converted German merchant ships of about 7000 tons with every facility for providing repairs, extra oil tanks for fuelling, were ready to burst upon the ocean in support of these U-boats.

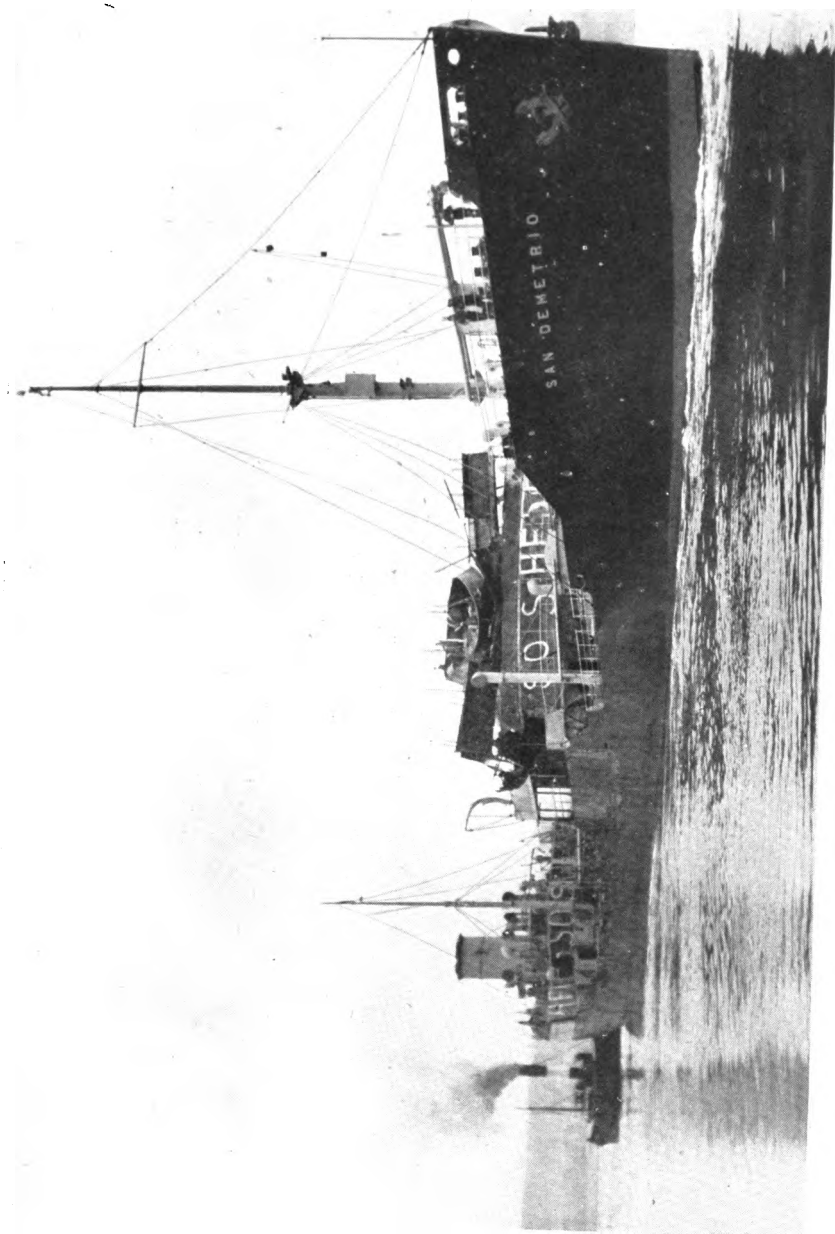
Attacks on convoys by surface raiders we can understand as being so extremely tempting that the Nazis will be prepared to take a big risk. There was one such assault on December 25, 1940, but British cruisers were not so engrossed in festivities as to neglect their succour. They were summoned to the scene in time to drive off what may have been either the *Scharnhorst* or *Gneisenau*, but a few weeks later one or both of these two ships received quite a shock on finding H.M.S. *Malaya* (one of the *Queen Elizabeth* battlehips) escorting a convoy. That was an anxious period through which we were passing in the winter of 1940-41. When the enemy introduced the *Bismarck* on to the Atlantic scene it was in principle similar to the *Admiral Graf Spee* series of incidents mentioned at the beginning of this book, though of an intensity several degrees greater. It was as a result of the news that the *Bismarck* was at sea that we also employed the battle-ships *Rodney* and *Ramillies* as Atlantic escorts for our convoys.

An instance of a convoy's weakness was that affair which occurred on February 14, 1941, when six ships in convoy were passing near the Azores, and this is one further case of German mentality exercising itself in the second war pretty much as in the first. For the autumn of 1917 saw Admiral Jellicoe alarmed by the amount of commercial shipping being attacked in the Azores area by one of the largest of Germany's U-boats. The organization of supply services to these submarines was even now being considered by an Inter-Allied Conference. The only difference between 1941 and 1917 is that whereas in the former the destruction was done by a surface ship—either *Admiral Hipper* or *Scharnhorst* or the *Gneisenau*—it was a large well-armed U-boat which operated here in Admiral Jellicoe's time.

For the neighbourhood of the Azores is just one of those nodal points where we should expect to find a ready stream of potential victims presented by a great shipping nation. Hither pass tracks of vessels voyaging between England and Brazil, the Mediterranean and the United States.

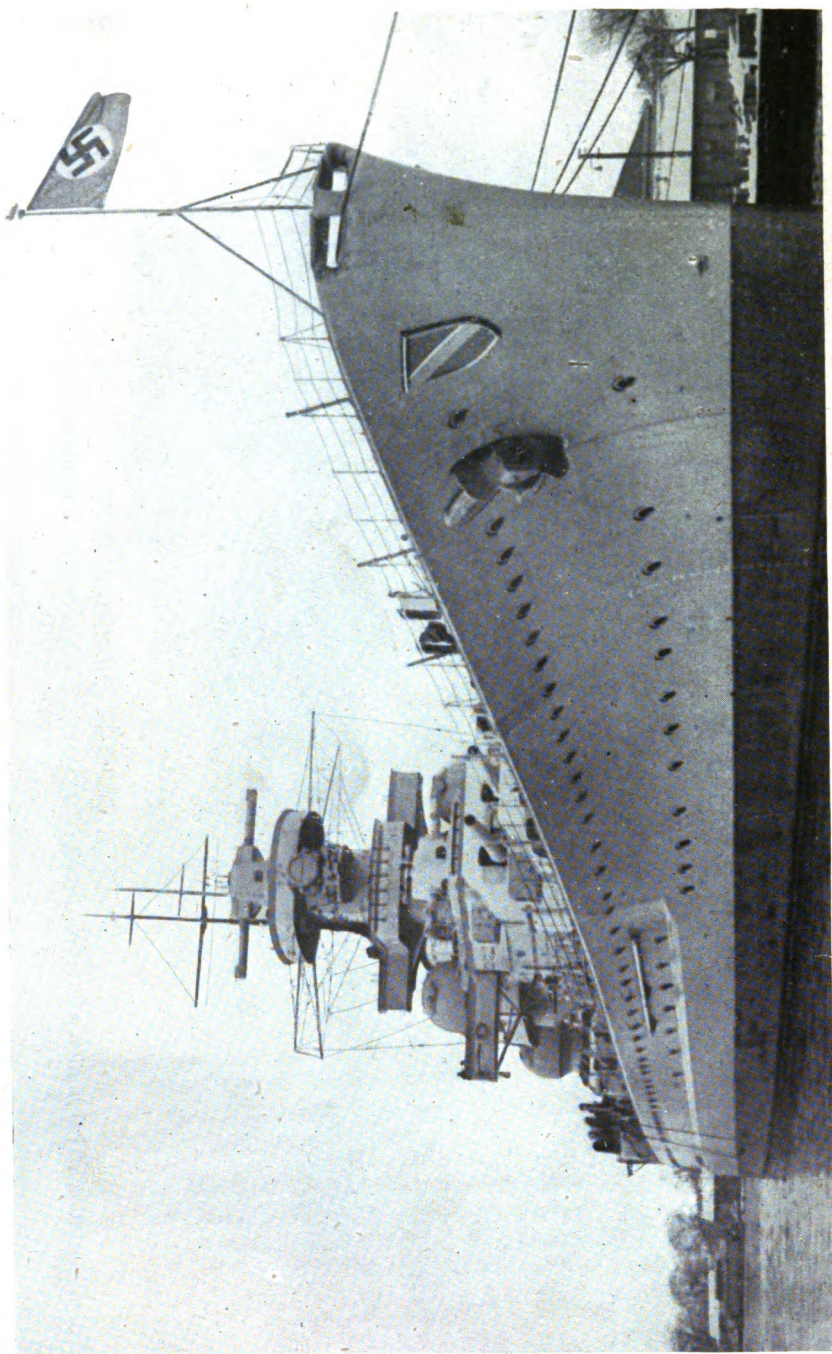
The sinking of *Bismarck* so promptly was the severest reply which the Nazis could ever conceive as affecting our commercial shipping. It was a far bigger thing than the self-destruction of the *Admiral Graf Spee*, and nothing within the history of surface raiders has ever been so notable. To us, as a maritime nation utterly dependent on the safe and steady arrival of our overseas shipping, nothing would impart such confidence alike to ship-owners, mariners, and the public as to know that in coming over the ocean each convoy is escorted by at least one fast battleship. But we perfectly well appreciate that such a condition is impossible, and though such a vessel may guard against other battleships, it is no decisive protection either against aeroplanes or submarines. And we cannot afford to detach our battleships from other duties.

It is no good making light of the losses which the Mercantile Marine has suffered from surface raiders, submarines, aeroplanes and (in shallower waters) mines. By January 1941 we were very concerned about these losses, for Hitler believed that his combination of U-boats with the Focke-Wulf aircraft would sweep our commercial vessels off the seas. But the truth is that by the end of 1941 we managed to drive the U-boats further out and to snap the co-operation which they had with the aeroplanes. The sinkings by submarines have varied, and 500,000 tons a month is not a pleasant contemplation. For the year 1941 the total amounted to 2,592,794 tons of British, Allied and neutral shipping.



THE TANKER REACHES PORT

Notwithstanding all her immense fires and internal damage and diminished crew, she got back home, as above. The achievement was remarkable.



SCHARNHORST

A battle-cruiser which, with her 26,000 tons displacement and 27 knots speed, for a time was regarded as the successor of *Admiral Graf Spee*, became a raiding terror with no fewer than nine 11-inch, a dozen 5.9-inch, fourteen 4.1-inch, and many other anti-aircraft guns.

These figures are undeniably serious. On the other hand, very soon British and American shipyards—unless something unforeseen happens—will have drawn level with sinkings wrought by the Nazis. Granted that this wonderful rate of building is maintained during 1943, the United Nations will own as much tonnage as in 1939. Of course, we have to make the proviso that war with Japan might make a great difference. For instance, if she were to fit out and send forth those surface raiders that we considered in another chapter, our reasoned optimism might have to be qualified. Or a Japanese fast armed cruiser or (for a time) powerful battleship let loose on the ocean might mop up any part of the Mercantile Marine in the shortest time.

Shortly before Japan entered the war against us, a polyglot crew was serving aboard a Dutch cargo ship which had been chartered by the Japanese. This vessel had loaded 4000 tons of coal for Yokohama. Now, whilst steaming over the Pacific and only 20 miles from the Japanese coast on December 7, 1941, the radio officer picked up news of the Japanese attack on Hawaii. But the radio operator happened to be a Russian, who promptly refrained from communicating the news to some Japanese officers aboard, but he gave the news to those of his fellow-countrymen.

The latter therefore immediately conspired with the Dutch and Chinese members of the crew. Moving swiftly, the latter overpowered the Japanese officers, took charge of the ship and, although they ran short of provisions, headed for one of the American ports, where they arrived safely.

But sometimes a large passenger ship was able to dodge danger and reach her port of destination uninjured. The Cunard White Star liner *Georgic*, a fine ship of 27,750 tons, in February 1941 set out from Liverpool for New York. This was a time when Axis aeroplane bombers used to fly out over the shipping lanes which were fouled by the presence of submarines and the sporadic surface raiders. It was a voyage that no such vessel as the great *Georgic* would undertake without deep consideration: in fact, the last passenger liner to berth in New York as such was the same Company's *Samarra* with 684 passengers on November 18, 1940.

Now, the *Georgic* was barely two days out from the Mersey when she was attacked by a U-boat. Then swooped from the sky some of the R.A.F. 'planes, who dropped depth-charges so ardently that presently they were able to signal the *Georgic* that the U-boat had been sunk; and the British flier, after delivering her two bombs, rolled the conventional sign of victory that she had won. Finally the *Georgic* steamed into New York on February 11, 1941. Since last she was seen in that port she has been kept pretty busy. Two trips she had made to Iceland to help in that island's protection when a Nazi invasion was expected. From Iceland she was sent to Cape Town and a little later to the Mediterranean. Ships were indeed being seen on such different runs from their normal routine that one ceased to wonder when they were employed somewhere quite different.

We spoke just now of our aviators' efforts which made the Atlantic sky no longer safe for Nazi airmen who tried to bomb our shipping lanes, but the following story shows how the R.A.F. were able to menace the Nazi U-boats. No incident could more clearly illustrate the new method of warfare.

One day a Hudson aircraft was being piloted by Acting Squadron-Leader J. H. Thompson of the Reserve Air Force. Not too pleasant a day for

H

viewing the ocean. Poor weather, low-lying clouds, heavy wind. The middle of September. The Atlantic is often like this at such a date.

Suddenly Flying-Officer W. J. O. Coleman, who was the navigator-bomber, yelled:

"U-boat over there!" and pointed downwards on the ocean.

Immediately the Hudson swooped to attack and the rear-gunner got busy with his guns and the wireless operator took charge of another.

Four attacks they made and were just about to attempt a fifth when this operator remarked that he had seen a white flag.

The Huns had become alarmed rapidly, for at the first attack several of the U-boat's crew, clad in yellow life-saving equipment rather like our "Mae Wests", had come up, but the aircraft's guns made it so hot that the Nazis thought it more prudent to get back inside the conning-tower.

Then the enemy hoisted the white flag. Everything was happening quickly.

The Hudson ceased fire and descended till they were only 50 feet above the submarine.

The U-boat was clearly down by the bows, and waves were breaking over the conning-tower. It became more than certain that the Germans had had enough, as they held up conspicuously something white—probably a navigation chart that the skipper had been using.

It was time now for the Hudson to call up on his wireless both surface and air craft to stop the enemy from submerging. Heavy seas were smashing their crests against the enemy of our shipping, but keeping her guns pointed on the Nazi, the Hudson flew round about.

At last a Catalina flying-boat zoomed through the air. The Hudson was getting short of petrol: it was about time to go home.

"Look after our submarine," the Hudson begged, but just then another Hudson arrived. Finally, in strong force, came the Navy.

The tricky ways of Germans had not been forgotten. One H.M. vessel made a warning signal:

"Don't attempt to scuttle your ship, or we shall leave you with it."

For if the damaged submarine were left alone with the broad and boisterous ocean . . .

"Please what does 'scuttle' mean?" inquired the German across the waters.

"Means 'sink'," snapped out the other, as if to cut short this backchat.

"We cannot keep it afloat," protested the Nazi piteously. Like the Führer himself, the outlook was not bright: the submarine seemed to be getting lower and lower.

Bang !

The sound of a gun going off.

Everyone had been on the *qui vive*, ready for anything.

In that tumultuous sea one of H.M. destroyers rolling in the swell gave a lurch and a shot must have been accidentally fired, but it fell so low as to wound some of the Nazis anxious to get out of the conning-tower.

Finally, however, the much-cowed Nazis were removed by a dinghy. The submarine was taken in tow and fetched into a British port on October 3, 1941.

The date is to be remembered as that of the first German submarine captured from the air.

Both Squadron-Leader Thompson and Flying-Officer Coleman received the D.S.C. for this mid-Atlantic adventure.

And it can be remembered that if the Atlantic was notorious as the cemetery for ships, the Pacific belied its name as a peaceful ocean. Let us now introduce the New Zealand Shipping Company's Motor Liner *Rangitani*, 16,712 tons. Indeed, she was one of ten vessels which fell victims in the Pacific to enemy raiders. Eventually the raider landed 500 of the passengers and crew at Emirau Island in the Bismarck Archipelago on December 21, 1940, but subsequently they were rescued and landed in Australia.

When the *Rangitani* was attacked she became on fire and was sunk by this surface raider; the Nazi sent in a torpedo which struck in the cross-bunker right underneath the bridge on the port side. The *Rangitani* shuddered and began to sink by the head very rapidly. Finally she broke her back and disappeared into the depths within less than one minute.

The Second Mate jumped, and an apprentice followed him into the water wearing a kapok life-saving waistcoat; but still the ship was going ahead and her propellers revolving out of water. The circumstances for these two men were not simple, but they reached a raft to which a second raft was lashed. Altogether there were 18 men on these rafts. They had no food and very little water—two gallons. Yet in this predicament they remained for 15 days. It is not surprising that they found it very hot by day but cold by night. Wet through when the sea became choppy, rationed to three teaspoonfuls of drinking-water a day, no wonder that seven men died.

At the end of 15 days the survivors on the raft attracted attention by flashing tin-lids in the sun. It was when a boat came to take them off that some of them passed away.

Of the women who were travelling in the *Rangitani*, Mrs. Plumb, stewardess of the first class, early in the engagement was badly wounded, but gallantly refused medical attention until the other injured had been treated. Whilst still the liner floated, she helped and guided passengers to their boat-stations and continued to look after them while in the lifeboat. When, in fact, aboard the German raider, the doctors noticed that she was fainting, it was only now they realized her condition was caused by loss of blood and found that she had been lacerated by shell-splinters.

Among the 500 people landed in the Bismarck Archipelago from the raider were 70 women and children of British, French and Norwegian nationality. These were passengers not only of the *Rangitani* (a motor liner that carried passengers and meat); the 3900-ton *Komata*, owned by the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand; the *Holmwood*, 546 tons, a passenger steamer owned by the Southern Traders, Ltd., of Wellington; the 4413-ton *Triona* owned by the British Phosphate Commissioners; the 5181-ton cargo motor-ship *Vinni* owned in Oslo; but two more motor-ships owned by the British Phosphate Commissioners—the *Triaster*, 6032 tons, and the *Triadic*, 6378 tons. And probably among the 500 were survivors from the *Turakina* (9601 tons, a turbine steamer owned by the New Zealand Shipping Company); the *Notou* of 2489 tons, a steamer owned by the French and registered at Noumea; and finally the *Ringwood*, a 7293-ton ship owned in Oslo.

Of these ten victims sunk in Pacific waters, seven were British, two were

Norwegian and one French. One can observe from this rich haul how profitable was a disguised raider cruising about the Antipodes. Her technique may be gathered from the following.

Under cover of darkness the German raider, having in the distance sighted a British merchant ship, stalked her with great stealth. In fact, almost the first thing the British crew knew of the enemy's presence was a number of shells exploding over the victim and during 20 minutes doing considerable damage. The British Master ordered his men to lower the boats but the raider, with amazing savagery, was determined there should be no survivors and kept the ship lit up by searchlights. With this illumination the Nazis raked the deck with machine-gun fire as soon as anybody appeared on deck.

Such were the uncivilized means employed to prevent anyone trying to escape.

A torpedo was then fired, hitting the vessel amidships, and she sank very quickly. At this stage the raider launched her lifeboat and the Huns started to pick up the drowning men. Now whilst in the water the Master, the Chief Officer and the Third Engineer, finding themselves near each other, decided to make a getaway. They discovered a water-logged boat in which they hid until the German lifeboat returned to the raider-ship, which presently steamed away. Finding themselves still free, though homeless, they started to bail out the boat and at daylight returned to the wreckage to see if there were any more survivors. But they could find no one. Perhaps they might find a water-breaker? It was distressing to realize that in the boat they had neither food nor water. In fact, all that they discovered among the bits of floating wreckage was a boat's compass. With that their only aid they set sail and directed their course for land, which lay hundreds of miles away. Another desperate boat voyage before them!

Well, this adventure was different from so many others.

For only the very next day they sighted a British steamer, which, to their great relief, picked them up and rescued them from a hungry death.

Do you happen to know Nantes? The trade it possesses has gradually dwindled till the great ships used St. Nazaire near the mouth of the River Loire where, incidentally, the huge Atlantic liner *Normandie* was built.

The river is still navigable up to Nantes, whither also came, less than a generation back, full-rigged vessels. Nowadays shipping little bigger than coasters may be seen at the Nantes quays, but it would, in German hands, be a useful port of hiding for some moderate-sized vessel under good pilotage.

It was on the night of August 5, 1941, more than a year after the enemy had occupied France, that a German supply-ship entered that river, came past St. Nazaire and right up the river to Nantes, where bridges such as cross the Thames at London put an end to further progress except for an occasional tug. The German vessel was about 400 feet long and lying alongside the wharves.

Suddenly from the sky a British Beaufort aircraft flew down and dropped heavy bombs on the ship, but before the latter could open fire with anti-aircraft guns the aircraft had dived down to a few hundred feet and flown along the ship's length from bow to stern. To the enemy's great surprise,

thus far up-river, the place was anything but safe. Bombs were dropped at each end of the vessel and a column of smoke rose 80 feet high from the stern. Then immediately afterwards there followed at the bows a great flash with a shower of sparks and debris, and other bombs burst below-decks.

CHAPTER XIX

SWEEPING THE RAIDERS

THE hostilities of 1914-18 have been called more than once The World War, but such a generic title belongs rather to the conflict that began in 1939. So far as the marauding voyages of the surface raiders have taken place, these have been everywhere: the South and North Atlantic, Pacific, Indian Ocean, off the coast of Australia and New Zealand. That pretty well encircles the globe. But when British convoys rushed the Sicilian Channel to Malta and during the summer of 1942 were bringing much-needed supplies for Russia past the northern shores of Norway towards Murmansk, it seemed as if our commercial ships had still further proved that civilization trade-ships can endure everything, including the running of the most terrible gauntlets devised by the enemy's ingenuity and determination.

But here the character of raiding has been modified since the days of the *Admiral Graf Spee*. The temporary use of converted German merchantmen has given way to powerful battleships—Italian in the Mediterranean, Nazi in the Norwegian Sea—and no attempt at subtle stealth, but plain blunt force. The passage of convoys resembles in principle those days of convoys in the Anglo-French wars except that in the two localities of Northern and Southern Europe there is a greater intensity together with the intervention of aircraft.

Germany's most powerful battleship, the 40,000-ton *Tirpitz*, took part in the attack on the Murmansk convoy but afterwards retired into the Barentz Sea, which lies well north of Norway. But she was torpedoed and seriously damaged by a Soviet submarine.

The connection between surface-raider and convoy is something so real that we cannot mention the one without thinking of the other. It is because the ships are so valuable that a powerful escort has been thought necessary by us during summer months; and because this escort was considered so strong the Germans sent out as ambush the immensely potent *Tirpitz*, which had previously been hiding in Trondhejm. If such raids as this were pushed to their logical conclusion, it would mean that some of the biggest of the Home Fleet units would have to take an active share in warding the convoy. If so, the situation would be no dissimilar from that which developed towards the end of the last war. Let me explain.

In those days among other measures we had instituted was that known as the Scandinavian Convoy, which travelled from Lerwick in the Shetlands across the North Sea. In July 1917 this convoy was attacked en route by

a U-boat, but the escort of the armed yacht *Amalthea*, and armed whaler *Pilot Whale* both fired at her, and the destroyer *Arab* dropped depth-charges on the German. Now as a result of such escort, the enemy decided to let this convoy alone; nevertheless, Germany was reluctant to allow such a North Sea trade complete liberty.

So early in October 1917 a west-bound convoy started out consisting of a dozen British, Belgian, Swedish and Danish vessels escorted by the two British destroyers *Mary Rose* and *Strongbow*, with two trawlers each armed with a 6-pounder. Just after 6 a.m. on October 17 the *Strongbow* sighted two German cruisers, *Brummer* and *Bremse*, of high speed and each armed with a 15-centimetre gun. The German intention was to assist the U-boat campaign as able protection would be demanded and that would have to be taken from the existing anti-submarine forces.

Well, to cut this story short, the enemy opened fire, put the *Strongbow* out of action, sank the *Mary Rose*, sent the *Strongbow* down below the sea, but on fire, and sank also nine of the 12 ships in convoy. It was an ugly business, but the enemy, having completed his allotted job, hurried back homewards at 8.30 a.m.

The incident caused a depressing influence. Were our escorts, then, too weak?

On the night of December 11-12 of that same year the cruiser *Emden*, with destroyers, sighted the east-bound Scandinavian convoy consisting of six British, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian ships escorted by three armed trawlers on the convoy's starboard side, while the destroyers *Pellew* and *Partridge* were stationed ahead. In bad weather the Germans sank the whole convoy, the three armed trawlers, and the *Partridge*, but the *Pellew* escaped in a rain-squall.

As a result of this, regular supporting squadrons of battleships and light cruisers were kept at sea, meeting both the outward and inward convoys. Germany now thought again and reconsidered the situation, which had grown out of these highly protected convoys. What could the Huns do to stop this Scandinavian trade? How would such British escorts as battleships and light cruisers be defeated?

The German answer was a desperate one. Bring out the High Sea Fleet, attack the convoy's escort with battle cruisers, light cruisers and destroyers. The day selected was Wednesday, April 24, but became a complete fiasco. Suddenly, when 40 miles W.S.W. of Stavanger, one of the battle cruisers, *Moltke*, dropped one of her four propellers into the sea, the turbine raced, engine-rooms became flooded, so *Moltke* was taken in tow by the battleship *Oldenburg* and the main fleet turned round for the Heligoland Bight. Off List the *Moltke* was torpedoed by a British submarine.

The convoys were never interfered with again, and that autumn saw the close of war.

I have outlined this sequence of events in some detail so that we can see at a glance what convoys and their considerable opposition may result in: but we must not draw the analogy too closely because today the Hitlerian Navy is very different from that of the Kaiser. Equally true the Home Fleet is not to be compared with the former Grand Fleet. Still, we shall not forget that it has been strengthened by arrival of American naval forces.

But now that the *Bismarck* has been sunk, and the *Tirpitz* torpedoed at

least once, we may rest assured that not powerful surface-raiders but still the submarines and aeroplanes will be the convoy's bitterest enemies. It is true that in the Mediterranean Italy assisted against our convoy by her battleships, though this was exceptional. But when at the beginning of July 1942 the Italians changed their attacks in the air over Malta by sending small numbers of bombers with large fighter formations as escorts, the enemy at once lost heavily—seven of the 25 bombers, and eight of the escorts. A total of 59 enemy aircraft were destroyed over Malta in the first eight days of July.

Quite rightly it has been emphasized that we cannot afford to be without oil, but that the enemy's submarines have made a special effort to sink tankers. What, then, are we going to do about it?

There should be no little consolation in the fact that by January 1943 our ally the United States will possess the largest and most modern tanker fleet in the world: vessels of about 10,759 tons each and a speed of 14½ knots. Also, be it remembered, a new standard type of cargo tramp steamer was developed in the United Kingdom by the winter of 1941-2. Steamers can now be built with a cruiser stern in British yards, constructed from laying of keel and all ready to be launched, within four months. Even still more in America is this intensive ship-building practicable. So it comes to this proposition: whilst the enemy may still continue to torpedo, to bomb, and shell our cargo carriers, he cannot continue to do so indefinitely, and meanwhile Anglo-American co-operation is well on the way both to replace sunken tonnage and to control the activities of U-boats.

We may take further hope in this combined effort as regards destroying submarines from the air. The R.A.F. in those critical years of 1940-2 have driven the U-boats further and further across the Atlantic. Within a shorter period all the immensity of material and man-power may be trusted to become fully operative from the United States coast. The Atlantic is not a lake actually, but in these days when a single flying craft traverses a speed of several hundred miles each hour, how tremendously colossal becomes the anti-submarine army of the sky when both sides of the ocean are flying forth in full strength!

The life of a raider, whether surface ship, underwater submarine, or aerial Focke-Wulf, then becomes precarious. For the crash-dives of the Allied 'planes always on the alert, ever vigilant over vast areas, mean a far greater menace than Germany ever conceived. The enemy has in some shape or another based his whole trust on the explosive bomb. Well, consider what is the effect of that weapon employed against submarines. If the bomb falls fairly near, but is a miss, it will nevertheless do the following damage: start some of the rivets in the hull and leaks will begin to drip heavily; it may put any of the hydroplanes out of order, so that she cannot dive, or cannot come to the surface. A favourite dilemma is that from well below the surface she leaps on top and becomes a ready target for the next bomb, or or it may be that sufficient damage has been caused to allow a serious in-rush of water, which in turn creates compression of the air and makes breathing most difficult. In any case the submerged U-boat finds that every electric light bulb has been put out; the crew are made no happier treading in puddles, but the nervous effect of the explosion is such that that the new crew is never the same. Panicky, jumpy, they have only to experience a second external bursting of a bomb, and for every Nazi it means *saute qui*.

pent. A crew of such men do not go to sea again willingly in a U-boat, and there are too many instances of Germans fighting each other to escape their doom.

But let the bomb make a direct hit on the submarine. Hull is blown to pieces, so is the crew. If any should be alive, surrender is only too eagerly sought. Sometimes the bomb may explode underneath the submerged U-boat in such a manner that she is blown up to the surface. Even if the aircraft does not descend and drop another, or spray the conning-tower with machine-gun bullets, or use heavier guns, the German hope of being back in vigorous health will not encourage delay.

Unfortunately our flyers too often have "nothing to report" except the usual monotony of uneventful boredom. Between Iceland and Gibraltar, between the British Isles and mid-Atlantic, the area is so well patrolled that the enemy cannot easily surprise us. And in these days of wireless telegraphy, and the Navy kept in close touch (as seen above in that incident of Squadron-Leader Thompson) with the R.A.F., it is not long before a damaged enemy becomes a kill.

Today we need no reminding how meticulously Germany had planned for these raiders to roam every ocean, but for a long time those who could read what was about to ripen in Japan noticed that even several months before the actual entry into war, significant events were happening.

It was noticed, for instance, that the Japanese Mercantile Marine (with some exceptions) was being gradually withdrawn home. That is something which no nation causes to be done unless there is trouble ahead. And especially remarkable was this retraction seeing that the Japanese had through half a century created a vast spider's web of international trade and well-run shipping. If one part of the web was damaged, then the whole lot collapsed. It was just a vast gamble to get domination of the East, and part of the method was to compete so keenly in some trade routes that their rivals in such areas could not contend. Japan was ripe for this war; she waited only till Germany had been able to do their worst, then the Japanese saw (or thought they saw) their own chance to pick where they liked.

We have said something earlier on concerning her shipping so persistently allowed to progress. The cheap goods, the subsidized mercantile marine, the fast tankers, the modern cargo carriers, the undercutting of passenger rates—these were just so many steps towards amassing sufficient wealth and power over the Western World. Many of us failed to realize that in number of ships and gross tonnage Japan had become the third power among nations. Only Britain and the United States in that respect surpassed her. Those Japanese owners of diesel engines by their perpetual up-to-date practice were always in the front line by employing freighters of 14-20 knots instead of slow, coal-burning steamers of old-fashioned type. We have allowed these orientals to steal a march on us, we have lulled ourselves into complacency: but the climax is now. We have armed them against ourselves, but in a long struggle we can beat them. For example, if once we prevent the Japanese from getting at the oilfields owned by Western nations, all that Eastern oil-fuelled tonnage loses its value, their future becomes precarious. For the Japanese mentality essentially is that of a copyist rather than a creator and any new set of circumstances finds him flooded.

It was fortunate that Norway's Merchant Fleet should join up with ours in 1940. At the outbreak of war that country's commercial shipping amounted to nearly five million gross tons and was the most modern fleet in the world. Like the Japanese, two-thirds of the tonnage were diesel-engined of a speed from 12 to 16 knots. Even to an extent greater than Japan, the Norwegians were concerned with international, and not coastal, trade. In Norwegian tankers alone were 2,000,000 tons. Had Hitler been endowed with shipping knowledge, he would have realized that to enslave a maritime nation whilst allowing its extensive industry to exercise its trade co-operating with Great Britain was another of those big mistakes which have marked his campaigning.

It is curious what mistakes may sometimes be caused by fixing the gaze so concentratedly at one object that everything else is so out of focus as not to be discerned. Those who could read plain potents could visualize the oncoming of war with Japan. Why did the Osaka Syosen Kaiwya on August 7, 1941, close their branches in Singapore, Calcutta, Bombay, Manila, Sydney, Mombasa, Cape Town and New York, unless she was about to enter war against Britain and the United States?

But nowadays it is too late to look back on the hints and plain signs which stared us in the face. Too late is it also to forget those tragedies of the sea which the Nazis with unique callousness and unspeakable cruelty were themselves the perpetrators. Once a U-boat waylaid one of our merchant ships. The first torpedo was not critical, but then came a second. That caused the ship to be in a sinking condition. At that time Mr. Horace Thompson, of South Shields, Chief Officer of the ship, was in the chart-room, but the destruction was very thorough and he was pitched through the deck into the Master's cabin below.

From there he made his way to the bridge and discovered also the Master, still suffering. The Second Officer had been killed: likewise the Third. Thompson was a man 36 years old, and only five and a half feet tall. There was only very little time to waste in those precious minutes, but he had also been wounded, and the lifeboat was being loaded, so, picking up the Skipper (a big man weighing 15 stones) he carried him from the bridge into the lifeboat. Into that same craft went also 27 other survivors. They hoisted sails, pluckily navigated 500 miles to the nearest land, which was reached in nine days. That second sense which belongs to the sailor had been a great blessing, for in that boat were neither a sextant nor charts. The only thing was to work out a rough dead reckoning. The rest of the available gifts consisted of infinite resource, cool courage, and quiet determination.

Those are the qualities which have saved the lives of so many sailors, despite the Nazis' vilest efforts. Through two wars the seamen of Germany have been held up in general contempt before the world, but the British sailorman has never earned a higher reputation than has been won for him by self-sacrifice and blind devotion to duty. And we employ the word generically to include the engineering staff, wireless operators and even the stewards.

The Great Western Railway S.S. *St. Patrick* needed, of course, no such protection as that of convoy and escort, for the limits of her trip are between Rosslare and Wales. Now January 1941 embraced a time when Hitler's aeroplanes would fly over and think it smart to dive-bomb these passenger-

ships. When the *St. Patrick* was thus attacked, it resulted in the steamer losing 23 lives. The wireless operator, Mr. N. Campbell, groped his way in complete darkness to the wireless emergency set, stood among the debris that bombs had caused, and then he flashed two messages for help. Whilst Miss May Owen at once busied herself collecting the women and children, leading them to the boat-deck, the sailors were launching a lifeboat. She then took charge of these children and tended them; after the boat was afloat they were rescued and taken into port.

Many will remember, too, that pathetic incident when the S.S. *Benares* was torpedoed in the Atlantic in the early part of September 1940. Only about three months had passed since the conquest of France. The great aerial Battle of Britain was being fought out in the skies. Times at home were anxious, children were being sent away to Australia, Canada, the United States and elsewhere. People felt that they would prefer maybe years of safe separation rather than see their young families maimed by a bomb.

One ship thus chosen was that good-looking 11,981-ton *City of Benares*, the largest vessel in the Ellerman City Line. Built in 1936, she used to carry passengers to the Orient, driven by turbines at 15 knots. Commanded by Captain Nicoll, she was selected for carrying 90 British children with some adults across to Canada.

It was not considered necessary that the *City of Benares* should be in a convoy or escorted. Surely no Nazi would be so base as to torpedo a children's evacuation ship? But the full depth of German bestiality had yet to be plumbed.

On September 17 the ship was well on her way, several hundred miles from the British Isles, when a waiting U-boat considered the opportunity ripe for aiming a torpedo. Unfortunately it had a terrible effect, and the splendid steamer was doomed to sink. Altogether 79 of these 90 children were condemned to perish in the Atlantic. An assistant-steward, George Purvis, looked after many who survived. When the torpedo struck the ship, he carried an injured girl to the deck and then made his way through the wreckage to the darkened cabins, came across three boys and enabled them to join some other children on deck. Then he went back and brought another small boy.

The rising water was now up to Purvis' knees, but he went back to make sure no children had been left behind, yet by now the water had risen up to his waist. An SOS wireless call was sent out, and it is a pathetic fact that when Captain Nicoll went down with his ship, it was one of his brothers in another vessel who picked up the call. Including the 79 children, a total of 260 people perished. One destroyer summoned to the scene picked up the bodies of three children rising and falling in the Atlantic swell. Their little bodies were draped with the Union Jack, given a full naval burial at sea, the Captain reading the committal service and the ship's company standing bare-headed.

But of the boats which got away from the sinking *Benares*, one contained 46 survivors, and was found on September 25 by an R.A.F. Sunderland flying-boat. Thus for eight days this load of unfortunates had been adrift in mid-Atlantic. A few of the evacuees were picked up by a British warship on September 26, who found them 600 miles from land. Actually two Sunderlands had share in the rescue. One belonged to the Royal Australian

Air Force, which had just been convoying an escort when they found the lifeboat. This rescuer flew to the convoy and asked the Sunderland of the R.A.F. to look after the rescuing of the survivors, giving the exact position by means of the Aldis lamp. The Australian, however, could not stay, because his petrol was running low.

But the R.A.F. flying-boat immediately found the lifeboat on being directed, sighting the *City of Benares*' passengers sitting or lying down, except one man at the tiller. Some of these survivors were certainly in a pretty bad condition. It is true they had hoisted sail and were making their best speed, though that would, of course, be less than four knots. This second Sunderland, anxious to succour starving people, dropped a parachute bag filled with all the food in the flying-boat, and attached the parcel to a life-jacket to keep it afloat. The R.A.F. Sunderland circled round above the lifeboat and signalled the following message:

We are going to fetch a ship which we think is about 40 miles away.

But the lifeboat replied by semaphore and realized that the Sunderland was travelling too fast to read.

Before leaving these survivors, however, the Sunderland swooped low and reckoned that failing the impossibility of being rescued, it might be possible to take the boatload, or at least some, on board. That might have to be attempted if all else failed.

Away zoomed this flying-boat and found a warship, signalling to the latter that a boat full of people was adrift. The position was given and a promise to meet the warship near the lifeboat. It is interesting to note what ensued. At first the warship appeared to be not on her course for meeting the lifeboat, so the flying-boat signalled: *Follow me*. All turned out well, and when approaching the load of survivors the Sunderland dropped a smoke flare which the warship saw and acknowledged. The flying-boat having performed her duty now returned to her base.

One of the *City of Benares*' survivors was Mr. Bohdan Nagorsk, director of a Polish Shipping Company. He remarked after being rescued that they had made up their minds, for, having been eight days in the lifeboat, they had abandoned all hope. Little water for them to drink still existed and their food rations had become almost exhausted when suddenly the roar of aeroplane engines could be heard. "We looked up and to our great joy saw a Sunderland flying-boat. It swooped down out of the sky, the pilot signalled to us and then disappeared. The food, however, had missed the lifeboat and fell into the water.

It was the Fourth Officer, Mr. R. M. Cooper, who was in charge of the lifeboat, and with him were 45 survivors, including Miss Mary Cornish and some coloured natives. Miss Cornish performed wonders in keeping the children warm and in good spirits. She used to massage the youngsters' limbs and maintain their circulation despite the exposure. This boat had stood by till the *City of Benares* foundered, and the boat then picked up out of the water ten more survivors. She next ran before the wind, and a fine dry craft she proved. She shipped very little water, but when the sea got too high for safety in running any longer, she lay to her sea-anchor. Sometimes the wind fell right away and they paddled from the stern.

The reader will recollect that in several accounts of boat voyages men

have been surprised that on sighting a steamer they were not picked up. Why was this?

The answer is that in the swell and valleys of the ocean, whilst the peak of a sail may be descried above the wave-tops, that is about all. U-boats, even during the last war, whilst waiting for a victim to show herself, have been accustomed to shut off engines and ride to the wind with a sail hoisted aft. By this means the hull is kept from violent rolling and the fuel-oil economized. But whenever a vessel came upon such a sight she tucked up her skirts and tried to get away out of the vicinity immediately. Thus when this lifeboat from the *City of Benares* caught sight of a cargo steamer, that sufficed. The steamer thought it was one more submarine trap and didn't stop to waste any time.

It was owing to the vigilance of our aircraft and smartness of the men-of-war that so many evacuees were finally rescued from the Atlantic. But it was now recognized by the Government that since the Germans were so brutally inhuman as to sink a liner full of children, these attackers would stop at nothing. It would be safer for the boys and girls to remain in England in future. So the evacuees no longer set forth across the seas.

THE END

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